GANDHI, TAGORE
AND
NEHRU

BY

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I. TAGORE AND GANDHI

During his last visit to Santiniketan in December, 1945, Mahatma Gandhi made the following remarkable confession: 'I started with a disposition to detect a conflict between Gurudev and myself but ended with the glorious discovery that there was none.' The glorious discovery was mutual. To Gandhi the poet was also Gurudev, a great teacher of mankind, and to Tagore this politician was truly a Mahatma, a great soul, a redeemer of mankind. But the common man cannot share this discovery. He is dazzled by the one or the other. Most admirers of Tagore have been critical of Gandhi and most devotees of Gandhi have shown but a poor understanding of Tagore. And no wonder. For to the outward eye no two personalities could be more unlike than Tagore and Gandhi. Their names conjure up two different worlds, as different from each other as is the valley of Kashmir from the plains of Sind, different in the soil, climate and fruit of their genius. They thought, felt and lived in ways that seem to challenge each other. Even in physical appearance they seemed to belong to different racial stocks.

And yet beneath their many differences is a basic kinship, affinity of spirit which has made them, each in his own way, the voice incarnate of India. As individuals, with their limitations of temperament, their fads and their fancies, they are poles apart. But to know them truly, we must see them not as mere individuals but as representative Indians, as instruments of awakened, renascent India.

That is how they knew and understood each other, and that is how history will judge them. They, more than any of their contemporaries, have redeemed India's past and released the latent creative energy of her spirit. Their lives are a drama of India's spiritual sensibility reacting to the challenge of the West. They neither turned their faces away from the West, nor were they overwhelmed by its glamour or seeming might. In them alone East met West on equal terms. They took much from the West, but they gave back as much, if not more.

Unlike Tolstoy and Lenin, who seem to challenge and repudiate each other and represent a balance of contrary forces in the development of Russian civilization, Tagore and Gandhi have confirmed and upheld each other and represent a fundamental harmony in Indian civilization. It is this basic harmony, the oneness of the spirit of their genius, the parallelism in the *sādhana* of their life, running through a multitude of differences, that is so remarkable as to invite a study. Otherwise it would seem odd to compare a poet with a politician, an artist with a saint. Beauty cannot be compared with Virtue, though Beauty has its own virtue, and Virtue itself is beautiful. Gandhi's genius lends no comparison to Tagore's. They belonged to different orders. Their personalities, too, necessarily differed, as the deep blue of the midday sky differs from the pageant of colours at sunrise, as a piece of homespun differs from rich brocade.

'Both Gurudev and Gandhiji,' wrote Jawaharlal Nehru a few days after Tagore's death in August, 1941, 'took much from the West and from other countries, specially Gurudev. Neither was narrowly national. Their message was for the world. And yet both were hundred per cent

India's children and inheritors, representatives and expositors of her age-long culture. How intensely Indian both have been, in spite of all their wide knowledge and culture! The surprising thing is that both of these men with so much in common and drawing inspiration from the same wells of wisdom and thought and culture should differ from each other so greatly! No two persons could probably differ so much as Gandhi and Tagore!' What is, however, significant is not how much they differed in their temperaments, in their mental equipment, in their emotional reactions, but that seeming to differ so vastly, how akin they were in their basic character, in the spirit of their life-long *sādhana*, even in the content of the messages they have given to their people, howsoever much their language and accent may vary. Pilgrims to the same shrine, they came by different paths, the one trudging on bare feet, blasting barriers, building bridges over chasms, leading and heartening his crippled and despairing fellow-men, the other flying on eagle wings, scattering the nectar of his music on earth. That is why they greeted each other in mutual recognition and clasped each other's hand in genuine admiration, despite the seeming gulf of a thousand differences.

Birth and Upbringing

From a middle-class Vaisya family of a minor State in Kathiawar to an aristocratic Brahmin family of zamindars in Calcutta—at that time the political, commercial and intellectual capital of India—is a far cry. Compared with young Gandhi, young Tagore had all the advantages of birth and upbringing. Bengal was at that time in the full tide of a literary, social and religious renaissance. If

ever there was truth in the Bengali's boast that what Bengal thinks today the rest of India thinks tomorrow, it was then rather than at any other time. Among a stalwart band of pioneers were Rabindranath's grandfather, Dwarkanath, known as the Prince because of his generous and magnificent ways, his father, Debendranath, known as the Maharshi because of his spotless character and spiritual insight, his eldest brother, Dwijendranath, known as the Philosopher, his elder brother, Jyotirindranath, whose career was like that of a comet, trailing a dazzling path for a brief moment. In such an atmosphere and in such a family was Rabindranath born and brought up, handsome and gifted, fed on the very milk and honey of India's best culture. The influence of the Maharshi, whose life remains recorded as an authentic chapter in the annals of the experiments of Indian sages with Truth, formed the spiritual background of his son's education. This saved the Indian Goethe from the natural paganism of a poet's creed and made him in spirit a kinsman of Gandhi's.

What of young Gandhi? Though he was born in a respectable, well-to-do family of upright parents, he was not the favourite of fortune that was young Tagore, on whom Nature seems to have showered every possible gift and blessing. Shy and reserved, of no extraordinary distinction in appearance or talent to mark him off from others, he gave no promise in his boyhood of the extraordinary, almost superhuman stature he was to attain in his later age. It was as though Nature, jealous of the delicate and precious instrument she was fashioning, wanted to ward off the evil eye and so hid it in a commonplace sheath. Not even the instrument itself was

aware of the Herculean mission that awaited it in the world outside. No consciousness of genius haunted it, no prophet's frenzy ruffled the placid surface of an uneventful boyhood, no passionate longings forced their way out of the deep caverns of the soul. He was spared all premature strain of that overwhelming consciousness of his destiny which has been the making and the unmaking of many geniuses and prophets, till his mind had ripened and was able to bear the strain lightly, without pride, without aggressiveness. It is true that a deep sense of loyalty to parents, of devotion to duty, of truthfulness, and an unwillingness to think ill of others were evident even in the little schoolboy, but in the setting in which he was born and brought up these qualities were not perhaps extraordinary; nor did they give any hint of the dynamic mind of one of the world's greatest revolutionaries.

And yet, these qualities, though they could not at that time have led anyone to forecast his future destiny, are qualities which are still the rock-bottom of his character, their content and scope widening with the years. Loyalty to parents has become loyalty to Mother India, devotion to duty the unflinching dedication to the service of humanity, truthfulness pursuit of Truth, and unwillingness to think ill of others tolerance and fair-mindedness towards his political opponents. The little boy who was so deeply moved by a picture of Shravana carrying on his shoulders his blind parents on a pilgrimage was to grow up and carry on his shoulders the burden of his blinded countrymen to the pilgrimage of freedom.

As children both Tagore and Gandhi were very shy and avoided the company of their school-mates and

hurried back home as soon as school was over, 'afraid,' as Gandhi says, 'lest any one should poke fun at me.' 'As a rule,' he tells us, 'I had a distaste for any reading beyond my school books. The daily lessons had to be done because I disliked being taken to task by my teacher as much as I disliked deceiving him.' Young Tagore had no such conscience towards his studies, and did not mind feigning an illness to get rid of the conscientious tutor who would turn up even on a rainy day. But he had an inordinate passion for reading anything he came across outside his school texts. Once when he found a copy of Jayadev's *Gita Govinda*, written in Bengali script, he went through the whole of it, reciting sonorously, though he knew no Sanskrit and understood hardly a verse. But the music of the sound enchanted him and he copied out the whole book for his use. He would sit and recite page after page of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* without understanding a line.

The child was wonder-eyed and revelled in the beauty he could see even in the most commonplace sights. 'Looking back on childhood days,' he tells us, 'the thing that recurs most often is the mystery which used to fill both life and world. . . . . It was as if nature held something in her closed hands and was smilingly asking us: "What d'you think I have?"' Already at the age of fourteen the young boy was writing patriotic poems and reciting them at the Hindu Mela, which was then the nucleus of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. One of them was a biting satire on the pageantry and pomp of the Delhi Durbar held by Lord Lytton, while famine was raging all around.

About the same age or a little earlier young Gandhi too was experiencing the first stirrings of patriotic zeal

and was putting through, quietly and in utter secrecy, his first experiment with truth. Under the influence of an unworthy friend and in the sincere belief that meat eating was essential to the revitalizing of his people to enable them to cope with the British menace, he was training himself to relish meat—at what anguish to his sensitive mind he has himself told us.

For the early life and adventures of these two strange children of Mother India, we have no other authentic record save what they have given us in their autobiographies. While Gandhi, with scrupulous truthfulness and characteristic humility, has bared before us the most intimate details of personal and private life, Tagore has drawn a discreet curtain over them. Gandhi's personality is integrated in one single pursuit of truth and he keeps the doors of his life open as a laboratory for experiments which are of enduring value to all humanity. To quote his own words: 'As I have all along believed that what is possible for one is possible for all, my experiments have not been conducted in the closet, but in the open.' Whether it is true or not that what is possible for one is possible for all, it is certain that Gandhi in his humility refuses to attribute any special inborn genius to himself and believes that any one of us can become like him, if only we earnestly tried. And so to hearten us he talks less of his uncommon virtues and more of his common human failings and draws for us the picture of the little boy pilfering stumps of cigarettes thrown away by his uncle, stealing coppers from the servant's pocket money in order to purchase Indian cigarettes, clipping a bit of gold out of his brother's armlet, sitting tongue-tied with shame and confusion on the bed of a common

prostitute. Only a shameless cynic or a man of God like Gandhi would have the courage to lay bare his past to the curious gaze of all. Tagore was neither the one nor the other (at any rate not in the Gandhian sense), and has therefore screened away from public gaze the inner recesses of his emotional development. The complexities of that development, the pitfalls tripped over on the way, the scars burnt in the soul of one who was at once so sensitive and so vital will ever remain a mystery to us. We saw only 'the eagle-sized lark' soaring in the sky and flooding the earth with its wealth of music and of wisdom. Of the struggles of the unfledged bird in its nest we have little knowledge.

Basic Creed

Both were deeply religious. Each had a different vision, but both were sustained by the same faith in the absolute reality of the Spirit that pervades this universe and in the capacity of man to realize his oneness with it. Both strove, each in his own way, to attain this ideal. 'What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years,' writes Gandhi in his autobiography, 'is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end.' 'I have ever loved Thee,' sings Tagore, 'in a hundred forms and climes, in age after age, in birth after birth.' If nothing else remains, 'let only that little be left of me whereby I may name Thee my all.' Both were modest and truthful enough to admit that they had not attained the goal. 'I have not yet found Him, but I

am seeking after Him,' confesses one. 'The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day,' cries the other. 'Thou wert hidden in my inmost heart, but I failed to see Thee.' Both sought Him through love: one as Truth revealed in the Good, the other as Beauty revealed by Harmony. 'The stream which comes from the infinite and flows towards the finite—that is the Truth, the Good,' says Tagore, 'Its echo which returns to the infinite is Beauty and Joy.'

Neither sought his God in the privacy of a temple or in the solitude of a cave, or in the piety of a ritual. Nor did they follow the well-defined, traditional Indian path of psychic *sādhana*, popularly known as *Yoga*. Both sought Him in this world of humanity, one through active dedicated service of his fellow-creatures, the other through a direct, intuitive realization of his affinity with every aspect of creation. 'Your idol is shattered in the dust to prove that God's dust is greater than your idol,' says Tagore.

Gandhi's mind is more logical, his devotion more single-hearted, his passion less varied and more intense, his courage, his willingness and capacity to suffer much greater than Tagore's. He is the warrior and the crusader of India's new humanity, as Tagore was its herald and its bard. Tagore knew his limitations and could confess with humility: 'When I try to bow down to Thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where Thy feet rest among the poorest, the lowliest and the lost.' He could admonish the priest to seek his God not in the dim twilight of the temple but in the open and dusty road of human ordeal, where the tiller is tilling the ground and the stone breaker is breaking stones. He saw Him there, he saluted Him there, but could not keep Him company

there. Gandhi sees Him there, has sought Him there and keeps Him company there.

There is something of an ascetic, of an eternally self-denying *tapasvi* about Gandhi. He rejoices in renunciation and burns up his senses in the fire of his spirit. Tagore was a poet and a lover of life. He loved, tended and cherished the senses as a musician cherishes his instruments.

> 'Deliverance is not for me in renunciation,
> I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.'
> 'No, I will never shut the doors of my senses,
> The delight of sight and hearing and touch will bear Thy delight.'

'Enjoy without greed' was the maxim he had garnered from the Upanishads. Yet he was far from being an epicurean. His personal life was simple and clean, at times bordering on the austere, as those who lived with him know. But he knew that the Hindu spiritual tradition had over-stated the case for self-denial and had made life seem a bleak desert. He wanted to correct the balance and teach his people the art of enjoying life without vulgarizing it.

> 'Alas, my cheerless country,
> Donning the worn-out garment of decrepitude,
> Loaded with the burden of wisdom,
> You imagine you have seen through the fraud of creation.'

But though voluntary self-torture as a spiritual exercise was repugnant to his nature, he knew and valued the necessity of suffering as a purifying force in life. He could agree with Gandhi that 'Suffering is the mark of the human tribe. It is an eternal law. . . . . No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering, which is the one indispensable condition of our

being.' But he would have added that capacity for joy is an equally indispensable condition of our being. Nor indeed would Gandhi deny the fact. They differ only in their emphasis.

> 'Far as I gaze at the depth of Thy immensity
> I find no trace there of sorrow or death or separation.
> Death assumes its aspect of terror
> and sorrow its pain
> only when, away from Thee,
> I turn my face towards my own dark self.'
>
> (Tagore)

Gandhi is the apostle *par excellence* of non-violence. It is the breath of his life, as it is the breath that may one day save humanity from its nightmare of hatred and slaughter. But few people know that even before Gandhi had worked out and applied the possibilities of his faith and creed, Tagore had hailed the advent of such an apostle. In his drama *Prayaschitta* (Atonement) published in 1909 and based on his novel *Bau-Thakuranir Hat* published in 1883, and again in his drama *Mukta-Dhara* (The Waterfall—1922) he had created in Dhananjai Vairagi almost a prototype of Gandhi. Here is a character who, as his name suggests, has renounced all personal possessions and has taken upon himself the leadership of his unarmed people in a no-tax campaign against the cruel exactions of the king. Here is a regular satyagraha on a mass scale, based on truth, non-violence and fearlessness.

In 1927 Tagore wrote a poem on the Buddha, which might with equal appropriateness be addressed to Gandhi.

> 'The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred,
> the conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish,
> crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed.
> All creatures are crying for a new birth of thine,

Oh thou of boundless life,
Save them, rouse thine eternal voice of hope,
let Love's lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey
open its petals in thy light.

'O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth—

'Thou giver of immortal gifts
give us the power of renunciation
and claim from us our pride.
In the splendour of a new sunrise of wisdom
let the blind gain their sight
and let life come to the souls that are dead.

'O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.

'Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest,
with the poison of self-seeking,
with a thirst that knows no end.
Countries far and wide flaunt on their foreheads
the blood-red mark of hatred.
Touch them with thy right hand,
make them one in spirit,
bring harmony into their life,
bring rhythm of beauty.

'O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.'

Tagore, as is well known, had taken an active part in the early days of the Swadeshi agitation in Bengal. His poems, songs and speeches had roused and inflamed the fervour of patriotic passion in Bengal and had hardened the will of the people to resist. But while he could rouse feelings and stimulate thinking, as perhaps no one else could, he could not control and direct the action of his people. That is one great difference between him and

Gandhi, who is a born leader of men. Gandhi is human will personified. He is master of his own will and is therefore able to control and direct the wills of others. When the popular agitation in Bengal found its natural overflow in violent activities, Tagore shrank from it in disgust and, withdrawing from the arena, sought consolation in his Muse.

Nevertheless, it is astonishing to recall how closely the programme of national activity he had laid down and expounded to his people as early as 1904 in his lecture on Swadeshi Samaj and in his presidential address at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Pabna, in 1908, resembles the programme of constructive activity later framed and organized by Gandhi. Non-co-operation, Hindu-Muslim unity, anti-untouchability, village reconstruction, revival of handicrafts, rural education with its emphasis on training through hand labour, village self-government and volunteer organizations—all these were advocated by him in language of passionate sincerity. Though born and brought up in a city his heart was with rural India. From its landscape his muse drew its unfailing inspiration and to its neglected, voiceless masses his heart ever turned.

> 'To the dumb, languishing and the stupefied must we give voice;
> These hearts, wilted, withered and broken, must be galvanized with new hope;
> Beckoning them we must exhort, lift up your heads this very instant and stand united,
> They before whom you quake in fear, quake more than you in their guilt,
> They will take to their heels the moment you are roused.'

Though Gandhi had become the spearhead of Indian nationalism and Tagore was looked upon as the prophet

of internationalism, Gandhi's mission of liberation embraces entire humanity, and Tagore's love of his country was as deep-rooted and as intense as Gandhi's. 'I am wedded to India,' says Gandhi, 'because I believe absolutely that she has a mission for the world. . . . My religion has no geographical limits. I have a living faith in it which will transcend even my love for India herself.' Again: 'For me, patriotism is the same as humanity. I am patriotic because I am human and humane. My patriotism is not exclusive. I will not hurt England or Germany to serve India. . . . . A patriot is so much less a patriot if he is a lukewarm humanitarian.' Tagore's patriotism needs no advocate. His songs were on the lips of Bengal's martyrs face to face with the gallows. He wanted the freedom of India, not that she may shut herself up in her isolation, nor that she should lord it over other nations, but that she may be in a position to offer to the world her best gifts and be able to accept from others the best they have to offer. He resented India's political subjection because to continue existence as 'the eternal rag-picker at other people's dustbins' is the greatest shame. 'All humanity's greatest is mine. The infinite personality of man can only come from the magnificent harmony of all human races. My prayer is that India may represent the co-operation of all the peoples of the earth. For India unity is truth and division evil.'

No two Indians of recent times have raised their country's stature so high, given their countrymen so much to be proud of and revealed to them the greatness of their heritage and the possibilities of their future so vividly as these two. And yet neither of them ever flattered their people's vanity or encouraged national or racial self-

complacence. They have been the most unsparing critics of their people's failings. 'If Indians have become the pariahs of the empire,' said Gandhi, 'it is retributive justice meted out to us by a just God.' Says Tagore:

> 'Prisoner, tell me who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain,
> It was I, said the prisoner, who forged this chain very carefully.'
>
> 'O my hapless country those whom you have insulted
> Their humiliation will drag you down to their own level.'

'India contains all that is disgusting and all that is noble. You take your choice,' says Jawaharlal Nehru. Both Tagore and Gandhi, like Jawaharlal himself, have made no choice. They accepted their country in its entirety, heightening its nobility and cleansing, purifying and redeeming its disgustingness. Both understood by Swaraj something far more positive than mere freedom from foreign domination. Both were jealous guardians of moral values. Both were passionate believers in the sanctity, the inviolable right, of the individual's personality, and were therefore mistrustful of the ever-increasing claims of the State over the individual in a modern industrial society. Both were inveterate and vehement preachers against the dangers of a materialist and mechanical civilization. Tagore hated the spirit of the Machine Civilization which ruthlessly grinds the individual under its wheels in the name of efficiency, though he was an admirer of Western science and believed that, properly controlled, the machine could and should be made to serve the needs of man. Gandhi is even more radical in his scepticism of the worth of an industrial civilization to human welfare: 'I would not shed a tear if there were no

rail-roads in India.' It is true that of late he is willing to compromise on that issue, in the sense that he will not stand in the way of industrial development in India, if Indians want it. But he has an ascetic's deep-seated fear of multiplying men's wants by making it easy to cater to them.

Though friends of the poor, neither was a socialist, in the accepted sense of the term. Both began by believing that it was possible to persuade the rich to regard themselves as trustees for the poor. Their insistence on moral values as the guiding factor in human conduct and their profound faith in human nature, coupled with their mistrust of the impersonal and non-human nature of the State, made it inevitable for them to think so. Though Tagore developed considerable sympathy and admiration for Soviet Russia towards the end of his life it is doubtful if he ever believed in socialism. Gandhi's theory of trusteeship, on the other hand, is so flexible, and his concern for the interest of the dispossessed so inflexible, that he may find it quite possible and consistent to advocate, or at any rate to tolerate, the expropriation of propertied interests without compensation.

Both were anti-fascists to the core and openly and passionately denounced Japanese aggression in China, even when British diplomacy was openly and shamelessly condoning it. It is a remarkable coincidence that both of them expressed readiness to go to Japan to plead with the people there to desist from the wrong they were doing. Such was their faith in human nature and such their universal sympathy that they never believed that a people could be intrinsically and wholly wicked, even when their governments were pursuing wicked ends. Wars, according

to them, were due not to the specific wickedness of this nation or that, but to the general fever of greed and violence generated by the industrial and materialist civilization of the West. The only way to prevent wars is to abjure violence, restrain greed and respect the supremacy of moral values. 'Modern arms,' says Gerald Heard, 'whoever employs them, can destroy civilization. Modern regimentation—*sine qua non* of the efficient employment of modern arms—must destroy all humaneness. It does not matter under what flag, under which slogan, you employ such methods. If you drink cyanide wishing to commit suicide or if you drink it believing it to be a cordial, the consequences must be the same. Means control ends.' If today European thinkers like Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley are able to assert that means control ends, it is because Gandhi and Tagore preached and lived by that faith for more than a quarter of a century.

Both began by crediting the British with good intentions and believed that if only they could be made to see the wrong they were doing to India, they would desist. Both were destined to be disillusioned, step by step, and came to realize that the British have one set of principles for home consumption and another and quite a different set for export to India and the colonies. India, to realize her destiny, must break away completely from the tentacles of British imperialism. There is no other way. But even in the bitterest moments of this realization, they never gave way to hatred and prejudice, nor indulged in self-righteousness, nor lost their wide perspective of humanity. What a contrast between their language and the language of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill against their enemies! Even the great intellectuals of England and America, men

who prided themselves on their universal tolerance, and the great religious leaders who preach commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount, could not resist the temptation of indulging in frenzies of pious hatred.

> 'They gather in their prayer halls in a pious garb,
> They call their soldiers,
> Kill, kill, they shout;
> In their roaring mingles the music of their hymns,
> While the Son of Man in His agony prays, O God,
> Fling, fling far away this cup filled with the bitterest of poisons.'

On the very eve of India's bitterest struggle for freedom, and even while assuming the leadership of the struggle, Gandhi could say: 'We must remove hatred for the British from our hearts. At least in my heart there is no such hatred. As a matter of fact, I am a greater friend of the British now than ever I was. The reason for this is that at this moment they are in distress. . . . It may be that in a moment of anger they might do things which might provoke you. Nevertheless, you should not resort to violence and put non-violence to shame.' In the whole history of mankind's struggle for freedom, there is no instance of such majesty of moral discipline.

Personal Contact and Public Controversy

Only for a brief interval during and after the first Non-co-operation movement was there anything like a misunderstanding and opposition between these two apostles of India's regeneration. It is not surprising. When two such gigantic personalities, at once intense, vital and original, rub shoulders, what is surprising is not they once challenged each other in an open controversy, but that throughout their careers their relationship was marked by

a spirit of deep respect, understanding and friendliness. Even when they differed, they were one in their spirit of mutual reverence.

Their personal contact dates from 1915, when Gandhi first visited Santiniketan where the members of his Phoenix Ashram had already found a temporary home on their return from South Africa. During that first visit, Gandhi, true to his practice, had suggested to the teachers and students that they should dispense with the services of the cooks and other servants and do all the work themselves. When the suggestion was put to the poet, he told the boys, 'The experiment contains the key to swaraj.' The experiment, however, did not last long, but the Santiniketan Ashram still observes March 10 every year as Gandhi Day, when all servants, including the sweepers, are given a holiday and their work is done by the students and teachers.

They met again at the end of 1917, when the poet recited his famous 'India's Prayer' at the opening session of the Calcutta Congress, and Gandhi attended a stage performance of the *Post Office* at the Tagore house.

In 1919 came the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy in the Punjab. When the news, despite the strict military censorship, trickled down to Bengal, Tagore was the first to make a public protest. It is interesting to compare the letter Tagore wrote to the Viceroy on 30th May, 1919, resigning his knighthood, with the one written by Gandhi on 1st August, 1920, returning to the Viceroy his Kaiser-i-Hind medal. 'The time has come,' wrote Tagore, 'when the badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand shorn of all special distinctions by the side of

those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.' 'I can retain,' wrote Gandhi, 'neither respect nor affection for a Government which has been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend its immorality.' Both were moral protests couched in words of great dignity and passion. But while Tagore's protest ended with the renunciation of his title, Gandhi's inaugurated the Non-co-operation movement. It is surprising that Tagore, who was the first to make such a noble and dramatic gesture of non-co-operation, should have failed to appreciate the significance of the mass movement launched by Gandhi. Gandhi met him in Calcutta in September, 1921. No record exists of the interview, but it seems that the two parted, agreeing to differ.

The best statement and exposition of these differences is given us by Romain Rolland—a foreigner who was great enough to appreciate and interpret these two. We cannot do better than quote his words.

'The controversy between Tagore and Gandhi, between two great minds, both moved by mutual admiration and esteem, but as fatally separated in their feeling as a philosopher can be from an apostle, a St. Paul from a Plato, is important. For on the one side we have the spirit of religious faith and charity seeking to found a new humanity. On the other we have intelligence, free-born, serene, and broad, seeking to unite the aspirations of all humanity in sympathy and understanding.

'Tagore always looked upon Gandhi as a saint, and I have often heard him speak of him with veneration. When, in referring to the Mahatma, I mentioned Tolstoy, Tagore pointed out to me—and I realize it now that I know

Gandhi better—how much more clothed in light and radiance Gandhi's spirit is than Tolstoy's. With Gandhi everything is nature—modest, simple, pure—while all his struggles are hallowed by religious serenity, whereas with Tolstoy everything is proud revolt against pride, hatred against hatred, passion against passion. Everything in Tolstoy is violence, even his doctrine of non-violence.

'Yet it was inevitable that the breach between the two men should widen. . . . . At the time he (Tagore) was not only the "poet" but the spiritual ambassador of Asia to Europe, where he had asked people to co-operate in creating a world university at Santiniketan. What an irony of destiny that he should be preaching co-operation between Occident and Orient at one end of the world, when at that very moment non-co-operation was being preached at the other end.

'Non-co-operation clashed with his way of thinking, for his mentality, his rich intelligence, had been nourished on all the cultures of the world. . . . . In other words, just as Goethe, in 1813, refused to reject French civilization and culture, Tagore refuses to reject French civilization. While Gandhi's doctrine does not really set up a barrier between the East and the West, Tagore knows it will be interpreted as doing so, once Hindu nationalism is stirred. Tagore saw the danger of mental despotism loom near, and in the *Modern Review* of October, 1921, he published a real manifesto, "An Appeal to Truth", which was a cry of revolt against this blind obedience. The protest was particularly strong because it was preceded by a beautiful homage to the Mahatma.

'Tagore's noble words, some of the most beautiful ever addressed to a nation, are a poem of sunlight and plane

above all human struggles. And the only criticism one can make of them is that they plane too high. . . . .

'In his answer to Tagore, Gandhi displays more passion than he has so far shown in the controversy. On October 13, 1921, in *Young India*, his stirring rejoinder appears. Gandhi thanks the "Great Sentinel" for having warned India as to the pitfalls ahead. He agrees with Tagore that most essential of all is the maintenance of a free spirit. . . . . Tagore is the sentinel who warns of the approach of the enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance and Inertia. But Gandhi does not feel that Tagore's misgivings are justified.'

Here is Gandhi's reply:

'To a people famishing and idle the only acceptable form in which God dare appear is work and promise of food as wages. . . . . Hunger is the argument that is drawing India to the spinning wheel.

'The poet lives for the morrow, and would have us do likewise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds in the early morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. Those birds had their day's food and soared with rested wings in whose veins new blood had flown the previous night. But I have had the pain of watching birds who for want of strength could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than he pretended to retire. For millions it is a vigil or an eternal trance. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir.

'Give them work that they may eat! Why should I, who have no need to work for food, spin?—may be the question asked. Because I am eating what does not belong

to me. I am living on the spoliation of my countrymen. Trace the source of every coin that finds its way into your pocket, and you will realize the truth of what I write. Every one must spin. Let Tagore spin, like the others. Let him burn his foreign clothes, that is the duty today. God will take care of the morrow. As it says in the Gita, Do right.'

'Dark and tragic words these!' comments Romain Rolland. 'Here we have the misery of the world rising up before the dream of art and crying, "Dare deny me existence!" Who does not sympathize with Gandhi's passionate emotion and share it? And yet in his reply, so proud and so poignant, there is nevertheless something that justifies Tagore's misgivings: *Sileat poeta*, imposing silence on the person who is called upon to obey the imperious discipline of the cause. Obey without discussion the law of Swadeshi, the first command of which is, Spin!'

What a sad and unnecessary controversy! Here was the poet challenging the very man for whose advent he had waited and prayed, whose very methods he had anticipated and blessed in his poems, speeches, dramas and novels. And Gandhi should have been the first to admit that the Great Sentinel had more than earned his right to his bread and did not need to spin to justify his existence. However, the poet was silenced. Had he not admonished himself: 'If you can't march in step with your compatriots in the greatest crisis of their history, beware of saying they are in the wrong, and you in the right! But give up your place in the ranks, and go back to your poet's corner and be prepared to meet with ridicule and public disgrace.' Retiring into his poet's corner,

he wrote the drama *Muktah Dhara* (The Waterfall), which was the highest tribute he could have paid to Gandhi and his crusade of non-violence. So ended the controversy which only brought into relief the innate greatness of the two and the enduring affinity of their spirits.

Years passed; Gandhi lay in Yeravda Prison, determined to resist with his life the iniquitous Communal Award. The epic fast was to awaken the conscience of his people and of their alien rulers. On 9th September, 1932, before the fateful day dawned, he remembers his great fellow-spirit and pens these words to him:

Dear Gurudev,

This is early morning 3 o'clock of Tuesday. I enter the fiery gate at noon. If you can bless the effort I want it. You have been to me a true friend because you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. . . . . If your heart approves of the action, I want your blessing. It will sustain me. I hope I have made myself clear.

My love,
M. K. GANDHI

But before the letter was despatched, the poet's telegram was handed to him. 'It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity. . . . . Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love.'

On the 24th the poet left for Poona and was at Gandhi's bedside in the Yeravda Prison in time to receive the happy news that the British Government had relented and Gandhi had won. Before the fast is broken he sings to Gandhi his beautiful song, a favourite of Gandhi's, 'When

the heart is dried and parched up, come with your shower of mercy.'

They met again in March, 1936, in Delhi and two years later in Calcutta, on which occasions Gandhi came to the poet's aid and collected funds to help Visvabharati tide over its difficulties. Their last meeting—the most touching and most beautiful of all—took place in Santiniketan in February, 1940, when 'this great soul in a beggar's garb,' to quote the poet's description of him, came to see him. A few months later when Tagore lay in Calcutta, hovering between life and death, Gandhi sent his personal secretary, Mahadev Desai, to see him. As Mahadev Desai handed to him Gandhi's letter, the poet's hands shook with emotion and tears trickled down his cheeks. He who never wept in sorrow wept in joy. The friendship of these two to the end, despite the many differences that seemed to divide them, will be remembered by their countrymen as an undying testimony to their greatness. Had one of them been a little less great, they would have fallen out. It was so easy to misunderstand each other, with their sensibilities and their ways of living so sharply in contrast, their fields of activity so widely separated, and each surrounded by admirers, not as tolerant and understanding as the masters. That they did not do so is a measure of their stature.

Tagore is no more. He lives only in his words and in them he will live as long as men cherish love for the beautiful. Whether his ideas are accepted or repudiated, as long as words have power to move men's hearts, his immortal words will continue to stir, delight and elevate the hearts of his readers. Gandhi is happily still with us. Millions love him and thousands follow him. Millions

will continue to worship him. If he succeeds in his mission, he will have achieved what no man ever achieved before. If he fails, he will have failed, to use Tagore's words, 'as the Buddha failed and as Christ failed to wean men from their iniquities, but he will always be remembered as one who made his life a lesson for all ages to come.'

II. DEMOCRACY AND NON-VIOLENCE

There is an aspect of Non-violence which does not seem to have received the attention it merits. The immediate political objective of our people being the achievement of self-government, we have hitherto thought of Non-violence only as a possible means to that end. Those who believe it capable of achieving that end do so partly because they have been witness to its actual success in the field during the last three decades, partly because the alternative seems too hazardous to risk, and partly because of their faith in the political genius of its author, Mahatma Gandhi. Perhaps to some extent the moral and religious quality of the means has influenced people in their judgement, but in the main they have taken to it in the hope that it will achieve the end, or, at any rate, take them a long way towards it. Those, on the other hand, who are sceptical or definitely hostile argue that historical evidence does not warrant such extravagant faith, there being no precedent of a people winning political independence by these means. Even the traditionally pacifist Chinese had to resort to violence to overthrow the Manchu usurpers. But since history not only repeats itself but also creates fresh precedents, there seems to be no scientific basis on which to decide the issue between these two assumptions, save by allowing the experiment a fair trial to prove or disprove its hypothesis.

But though there may be no historical proof of the success of Non-violence as a political weapon for overthrowing a rule itself guarded by violence, there is plenty

of evidence in favour of this method, not merely as a possible means but as the only effective means of preserving democratic institutions once they have been set up. If we study the political habits of those peoples who have succeeded in preserving such institutions, we shall find that they have been enabled to do so only when and to the extent they have abjured the use of violence as a way of converting one another to their respective points of view. England, where such institutions have taken so deep a root that even contrary institutions like Monarchy and the Peerage have been made to subserve a democratic end, is in this respect a good field for the study of the political habits of a people. If it be true that people deserve the institutions they have, then it should be worth our while to observe the political habits of a people who seem to have succeeded in adapting even anti-democratic institutions to popular control. Of these habits the most remarkable seems to be the tacit understanding among the various political parties, and indeed between each citizen and all, that their political differences shall not be settled by resort to arms. They will use every possible means of harassing and defeating their opponents save violence. Thus the Tories to whom nothing could be more odious than the possibility of Labour coming into power as the Government of Great Britain, have nevertheless allowed that spectre to haunt them and have even seen it assume flesh, rather than risk the use of violence in their political life by using their power, while in government, to suppress all opposition.

It is not that the Briton abhors the use of violence on all occasions: if he did, he may indeed make the whole world safe for democracy, but he would have to renounce

the ill-gotten gains of his Empire. Both in India and his other colonial possessions, as in international relations, he has freely trusted to the power of violence; which is why there is no democracy in India and nothing but anarchism in international affairs. But in his own land and with his own people he has evolved a different technique of political behaviour. He trusts to the power of persuasion to convert his fellow-citizens and would rather submit to a verdict he knows to be wrong than challenge it by violence.

One may, indeed, question how far the British are truly democratic even in their own country; how far the social, political and economic privileges are equally shared by all the people. One can even demonstrate that in actual practice these privileges are, more or less, the monopoly of a certain hereditary and moneyed class. Nevertheless the fact remains that the essential condition of political democracy, namely, freedom in the choice of one's rulers, is actively enjoyed by Englishmen, however badly that choice might be exercised. A hundred subtle and sinister influences, controlled and manipulated by the class that owns the tools of propaganda, may seduce or scare the common man's judgement and make him exercise his choice against his best interests, but so long as no violence is used to terrorize him and render the exercise of this political right impossible, he must be regarded, in the last analysis, as free, and the society to which he belongs democratic.

What would happen if this habit of non-violence were missing in English political life? Obviously the group best organized and most eager to seize power would either terrorize the government by a series of well-planned

assassinations, like the ones the Japanese militarists periodically carried out, or declare open defiance and march on the capital as Mussolini did, in which case if it succeeded it would see that no other political opposition remained to take advantage of the precedent, or if it failed, would most probably be exterminated, as were Captain Rohm and other 'friends' of Hitler in 1934. For the government in power, in order to protect itself at any cost, would meet violence with greater violence, in which process no vestige of democracy would be allowed to survive. Both the French and the Russian Revolutions are classic examples of liberty perishing in the very process of being born.

It may be that democracy is not the ideal or the most desired form of government and that the dictatorship of the proletariat may be more welcome to the workers, even as some sort of Fascism may answer the needs of the possessing classes better. My object in this essay is not to inquire into the merits of different forms of government, but to suggest that if democracy is to function (assuming that it is a desirable form of government or at any rate a form actually desired by some peoples) it can only do so successfully when the citizens have acquired the habit of settling all issues by recourse to argument and persuasion and completely forsworn the use of violence for that purpose. Only to the extent that this habit is effective in the ordering of their political activities, has democracy a chance to bear its fruits of freedom for the citizen.

To an Indian used to a century and a half of British violence, indeed to all students of the history of British foreign policy, it may sound paradoxical to quote the

British as a model of non-violence. Yet the paradox is part of the much bigger paradox of life which presents us daily with innumerable instances of human beings virtuous in one respect, vicious in another, loving and unselfish to some, brutal and selfish to others. We are never virtuous logically. Do we not meet with instances in our own country of men who would not wittingly cause an injury to an ant, who yet allow in their midst—indeed vehemently resist the abolition of—such awful survivals of social callousness as a Hindu child-widow? In our jails will be found many a vegetarian who did not scruple to murder a human being. It should not therefore seem too fantastic to regard John Bull as a very non-violent citizen in his own society, even though he himself would be shy of claiming for himself so Gandhian an adjective.

In India, on the other hand, despite our so-called traditional pacifism and three decades of Gandhiji's leadership, we are far from non-violent in our mutual dealings. We are more non-violent when we face the British than we are when one community is pitched against another, one party against its rival. No wonder Gandhiji suspects our non-violence to be rooted in weakness and fear. Such non-violence, instead of making freedom of the people possible, will make the perpetuation of their slavery inevitable. We cannot decide a simple historical matter, whether a particular building in Sukkur was originally a mosque or not, without repeating the history of Chengiz Khan's mass massacres. It is impossible to conceive of democracy functioning as a reality in India, so long as our political and communal parties keep up the practice of encouraging their followers to terrorize their opponents. Despite our protestations of non-violence and our

intellectual worship of democracy, we have not yet developed the habits necessary to make actual the former and real the latter. Communal outrages disfigure our political existence as persistently as does small-pox the faces of our men and women, and there is no reason to suppose that these social diseases will automatically disappear with the achievement of our independence any more than that plague and cholera will do so as soon as the British quit India. Whether we win our national independence by violent or non-violent means, certain it is that unless we learn to live at peace with one another we shall fail to maintain for the ordinary citizen those elementary but essential liberties which alone can make *Swaraj* real. If the citizen goes in constant dread of his political or religious opponent's violence, he would prefer any dictator to the sham of gilded democracy. No society can stand the strain of universal violence for long, and sooner or later men in despair turn to a tyrant for peace and willingly 'contract away' their liberty in return for security. Hobbes was not so unhistorical after all.

It is in a sense unfortunate that non-violence is being held in the light of a religious creed in our country, with the result that many persons look upon it as a characteristically Hindu discovery and therefore very good for the soul but hardly necessary to the material welfare of a society. Clever people who have taken great pains to fix their vision in proper historical perspective even inquire, 'Why drag religion into politics?'—as though men, save when they are religious, are always violent. (As a matter of history, religious people, for instance the early Muslims or the Christian Crusaders, have been more violent than people who were not so inspired by religious

passion, e.g. the Chinese.) It is desirable therefore that the practice of non-violence should be studied in its mundane and practical aspects, as a way of democratic and wise behaviour, and not as an extension into politics of Jaina vegetarianism or of the Christian idealism of turning the other cheek. For we find that wherever it has been accepted, however unconsciously, as the way of social and political life, it has brought to the people peace and liberty. There is an interesting story related of Kao Tsung, a Chinese Emperor of the T'ang dynasty. 'This is to the effect that in 666 he paid a visit to a clan famous for many generations on account of its harmony. The Emperor inquired of the chief the secret of this age-long concord. The patriarch took a sheet of paper and wrote thereon a hundred characters. Kao Tsung eagerly received the document, but found to his amazement but one ideograph, a hundred times repeated, namely, that for "forbearance". So the Emperor learned:

> 'That State shall need no other word, I swear,
> Whose statesmen get by heart "Forbear, forbear!" '*

*Gowen and Hall: *An Outline History of China.*

III. TAGORE AND SOVIET RUSSIA

One of the most remarkable things about Rabindranath Tagore was that as he grew older he became more progressive and radical in outlook. Men ordinarily tend to become conservative with age; Tagore grew more revolutionary. Nothing testifies more vividly to this amazing intellectual and spiritual vitality of his than his outspoken reactions to the Soviet Experiment during his visit to Russia in 1930. That the author of *Gitanjali* and the great exponent of India's spiritual heritage looked upon his visit to the land of the Soviets as a pilgrimage is a proof, if one were needed, that this modern Rishi loved truth more than religion and cared for human welfare more than for any philosophical dogma. 'If I had not come to Russia,' he wrote in a letter, 'life's pilgrimage would have remained incomplete. Before judging the good and bad of their activities here the first thing that strikes me is: What incredible courage! What is called tradition clings to man in a thousand different ways: its numerous apartments, its innumerable doors are guarded by sentries whose number is legion; its treasury rises mountain high, filled with taxes gathered over the centuries. Here in Russia they have torn it up by its roots; there is no fear, no hesitation in their minds. . . . . The cry of the Russian Revolution is also the cry of the world. At least this nation, of all the others in the world today, is thinking of the interest of the whole of humanity, over and above the national interest.'

Though it is doubtful if Stalin's Russia deserves this compliment, the fact remains that the poet, accepting the communist claim at its face value was able to overcome many a hurdle of life-long beliefs in one outburst of admiration. Instead of being frightened at the violent and ruthless uprooting of tradition, he was overjoyed. The internationalist in him was pleased that the curtain has gone up on the stage of world history. 'It would have been unpardonable not to see the light of the greatest sacrificial fire ever known in history.' Once he had been greatly moved by the words of a Korean youth that the strength of Korea was the strength of her sorrow. It was the great miracle of sorrow's strength that drew him to Russia. He had heard many contradictory reports about Russia. He had read of the pitiless violence of the Bolsheviks. Many friends had tried to frighten him away from Russia by painting lurid pictures of the lack of civilized comforts and conveniences in that land. He was warned that he would not be able to stand the coarse food and the crude ways of the Bolsheviks, and that in any case whatever he would be shown would be mere window-dressing. The poet even wondered if it was not too hazardous an undertaking on his part to visit Russia in his old age and while in such poor health. But 'the words of the Korean youth were ringing in my ears. I was thinking within myself that in the very courtyard of Western civilization, so triumphant in the power of wealth, Russia has raised the seat of power of the dispossessed, totally ignoring the frowns and curses of the entire Western world. If I do not go to see such a sight, who will? They are striving to destroy the power of the powerful and the wealth of the wealthy. Why should we be afraid

of that? And why should we be angry? We have neither power nor wealth. We belong to the hungry and the helpless under-dog class of the world.'

He was, as Gandhiji had once called him, the 'Great Sentinel' of the rights of man. He upheld the right of every individual, white, brown or black, to health, livelihood, education and freedom, which alone can guarantee him a fair scope for the development of his personality. If any social or political system, however sacrosanct, stood in the way of this development, he was impatient of it and willing to have it scrapped. And so when he went to Russia he could not help but admire the great accomplishment of the Revolution in raising the under-dog to the status of human beings. 'Wherever I look I see no one else but workers..... The question to ask here is: Where are the so-called gentlemen? The masses of Russia live no more in the dark shadows of the so-called gentlemen. Those that were hidden behind the curtain are now fully in the forefront of society..... Just within a few short years the ignorant masses have become full-fledged human beings. I cannot help thinking of the farmers and the workers of my country. It seems that the magicians of the Arabian Nights have been at work in Russia. Only a decade ago the masses in Russia were as illiterate, helpless and hungry as our own masses; equally blindly religious, equally stupidly superstitious. In sorrow and in danger they were wont to supplicate before their saints in the churches; in fear of the other world their mind was mortgaged to the priests, and in fear of this world to their rulers, money-lenders and their landlords. Their duty was to polish the very boots with which they were kicked by their masters. They knew no change in their

way of life for a thousand years. They had the same old carts, the same old spinning wheels, the same old oil-presses. Any suggestion of change provoked them to revolt. As in the case of our three hundred millions, the ghost of time sat on their backs and blindfolded them from behind. Who could be more astonished than an unfortunate Indian like myself to see how in these few years they had removed the mountain of ignorance and helplessness? And yet during those years of great changes, Russia knew nothing of the much vaunted "Law and Order" as it prevails in our country.'

He knew that the vast majority in every society are the beasts of burden who have no time to become men. They grow up on the leavings of society's wealth, with the least food, least clothing and least education. They who toil most receive in return the largest measure of indignity. They are deprived of everything that makes life worth living. They are, as he put it, a lamp-stand bearing the lamp of civilization on their heads: people above receive light while they are smeared with the trickling oil. He had often thought of them, worked for them and felt ashamed of his own more fortunate lot. He had been forced to the conclusion that poverty and inequality were perhaps the inevitable concomitants of a progressive society. 'Thus I thought within myself: It is necessary that a section of our society should remain on the top; and how could they remain on the top if there were no one at the bottom?..... Civilization begins only when man extends his vision beyond the bounds of mere livelihood. The finest fruits of civilization have grown on the fields of leisure. The progress of civilization demands leisure.' It was therefore necessary that the majority

should labour and toil so that the minority should have the necessary leisure. The utmost that the fortunate upper classes can do is to regard themselves as trustees for the welfare of the dispossessed and try to ameliorate their misery. 'But the trouble is that we cannot do anything of a permanent nature as a matter of charity. If we seek to do good to any one from the outside, that goodness becomes distorted in a number of ways. Real helpfulness emanates from a perfect sense of equality. Whatever it may be, I simply could not satisfactorily solve this complex problem for myself. And yet I felt ashamed of myself to be forced to the conclusion that the pyramid of civilization could only be built on the subjection and dehumanization of the vast majority in human society—the workers of the world.'

He had already come to believe, even before he went to Russia, that the moral right to the land belonged to the peasant and that the peasant could never improve his condition in India except through co-operative farming. But it was not a problem that an individual could solve by his own efforts. That the State alone could and should do it he never realized till he visited the land of the Soviets. His own experience of the nature of the State in his country had only taught him to mistrust its powers. But in Russia he for the first time saw a State that was truly of the people and for the people, even if not wholly by the people. He was not misled by the obvious lack of the so-called civilized comforts that were paraded in the other cities of Europe. On the contrary he was pleased that 'the polish of luxury is altogether absent from Moscow..... The thing I like best in Russia is the complete banishment of this barbarity of the pride of wealth.'

Nor was this modern Rishi scandalized by the so-called godless nature of the Soviet State. 'For many centuries the old philosophy of theology and the old philosophy of politics overpowered the intelligence of the Russian people and almost their very life itself. The Soviet Revolutionists have now killed these two evils to their very roots. My heart leaps with joy to see such a painfully enslaved nation attain such a great liberation in such a short time. For the religion that destroys the freedom of the mind of man by keeping him ignorant is a worse enemy than the worst of monarchs; for the monarch crushes the spirit of his subjects only from the outside. . . . The Soviet has saved the nation from the insult of the Czar and from the self-inflicted insults of its own people. Let the theologians of other countries condemn Soviet Russia all they want; but I cannot condemn her, and I do not. Atheism is much better than superstition in religion and the tyranny of the Czar, which were like heavy loads of stone on the breast of Russia.' Indeed, he goes on to say that it was only in Soviet Russia that he fully realized the meaning of these words of the Upanishads, *ma gridah*—Do not covet. 'Why should one not covet? Because everything in this universe is but one network of truth. Personal greed stands in the way of the realization of this oneness. *Tena tyaktena bhunjitah*—Enjoy only that which issues from this unity. From the material point of view the Bolsheviks are expounding this same truth. They consider the general welfare of humanity as the one supreme truth on earth. So they are willing to share equally all that society produces as one. Greed of wealth is the natural concomitant of personal ownership of property. They want to abolish this first,

and then declare: Enjoy only that which comes from this unity.'

This is no doubt too idealistic an interpretation of the Bolshevik urge. What is significant, however, is the poet's genuine enthusiasm at the spectacle of a society that had for the first time in history provided equal opportunities of health, education and happiness to all its citizens, irrespective of race, colour or religion. His enthusiasm was all the more sincere because he himself came from a country where these opportunities were effectively denied to the vast majority of his countrymen. Again and again he contrasted what he saw in Russia with what he found at home. 'The most costly tax we pay for our weakness,' he wrote from Russia, 'is the fact that instead of trying to remove the causes for contempt, the British are busy proving to the world that we are worthy of contempt. Sound education automatically solves all problems of human society. We are deprived of that boon in India, for British "Law and Order" leaves no room for any other improvement. After providing for "Law and Order" the treasury is totally empty..... The tale of our Hindu-Moslem quarrels is spread over the world by interested parties. Here, too, in olden days, the Christians fought with the Jews most barbarously. But education and good government have banished such communal quarrels from Russia for ever. I often think that Mr Simon and his Commission should have visited Soviet Russia before coming to India.'

Rabindranath Tagore was not a communist, not even a socialist. Marxism or the philosophy of dialectic materialism was repugnant to his mental make-up which sought for harmony and co-operation rather than contradiction

and conflict in the process of history. His faith in the validity of individual conscience and in the 'infinite personality of man' biased him against any technique of political action aimed at the wholesale and violent suppression of opposition. He had a horror of the machine dominating the man, and knew that the party-machine did it more effectively than any other kind. He believed that inhumane means were capable of perverting the most humane ends.

He was not a blind admirer of whatever he saw in the Soviet Union. He was aware of the ruthless nature of the Party dictatorship and of the many moral limitations of the Soviet experiment. But these defects did not make him lose his perspective. He did not miss the wood for the trees. He knew that a certain element of barbarism was inevitable in such a great and violent upheaval as the Bolshevik Revolution, but he trusted the great creative urge behind the revolution and believed that if those who held the destiny of Russia in their hands were true to that urge, they would gradually and in the long run eliminate the crudities one by one. They had made a great beginning and were educating the masses, and once the masses were properly educated, they would themselves act as a healthy check on their rulers. He wrote:

'I admit that dictatorship is a great nuisance and I also believe that in its name many persecutions take place in Russia. Its negative aspect is compulsion, which is sin. But I have also seen its positive aspect, and that is education, the very reverse of force. If the mind of the people is one in the making of the country's fortunes its activity becomes creative and permanent. To the zealots of authority the only means of obtaining their ends is to

keep everybody else's mind paralysed by ignorance. In the reign of the Czars people's mind deprived of education was under a spell and round it like a boa-constrictor coiled religious superstition. The emperor could without difficulty put this ignorance to his own use. It was then easy to provoke orgies of frightfulness in the name of religion between Jews and Christians, between Musalmans and Armenians. The loosely knit country weakened by ignorance and religious superstition fell an easy prey to the external enemy. Nothing could be more favourable to the perpetuation of autocratic rule. . . .

'In recent years Russia has witnessed the vigorous rule of the dictator. But to perpetuate itself it has not chosen the path of the Czars, namely, the subduing of the people's mind by ignorance and religious superstition, the impairing of their manliness by the lash of the Cossacks. I do not believe that the punitive rod is inactive in the present Russian regime, but at the same time education expands with extraordinary vigour. The reason is that greed of individual or party power and of money is absent. There exists the irrepressible will to convert the public to a particular economic doctrine and to make a man of everybody, irrespective of race, colour and class. Had it not been so, one must needs agree with the French pedant who said that to give education is a great mistake.

'Time is not yet to say whether the economic doctrine is completely valid, because so long it had tottered among books: never before had it enjoyed freedom so fearlessly and over so vast a field. At the very outset they ruthlessly banished the powerful greed which would have jeopardized this economic theory. Nobody can definitely say what final shape it will take as it passes through one experiment

after another. But this much is certain that the education, which at long last the Russian masses are so freely and abundantly enjoying, has improved and brought honour to their humanity for all time.

'One always hears rumours of cruelty of the present regime in Russia—which is not improbable. It is unlikely that her long tradition of cruel administration will disappear suddenly. At the same time the Soviet Government is untiring in its efforts to inculcate by means of pictorial and cinematographic interpretation of history the horrors of the system of government and oppression under the old order. If the present Government in its turn should adopt a similarly ruthless policy, it must be called a strange mistake, if nothing else, to create so strong an aversion to cruel treatment. At any rate, to defame Siraj-ud-daula for the Black Hole tragedy by cinema and other means and at the same time to perpetrate the Jallianwalla massacre would not unfairly be called the height of stupidity, because in this case the weapon is likely to turn against the thrower himself.

'It is obvious that a violent effort is being made to cast public opinion in Soviet Russia into the mould of Marxian economics; out of this obstinacy free discussion on this topic has been deliberately stifled. I believe the accusation on this score to be true. A similar attempt was made during the last European War to muzzle public opinion of people opposed to the government policy by imprisonment and hanging.

'Where the temptation for quick results is too strong, the political leaders are loth to respect man's right to liberty of opinion. They are wont to say: "Let us attain our objectives first: we shall attend to other things later."

The situation in Russia resembles war-time conditions. She is beset with enemies at home and abroad. There is no end to manoeuvring all round to wreck the entire experiment. The foundations of their structure therefore must be strengthened as quickly as possible; hence they have no qualms about using force. Nevertheless, however insistent the necessity may be, force is one-sided. It destroys, but does not create. The process of creation is two-fold. Its raw material has to be assimilated not by coercion, but by the recognition of its inner nature.

'Russia is engaged in the task of making the road to a new age; of tearing up the roots of ancient beliefs and customs from their ancient soil; of penalizing the luxury of time-honoured habits. When man finds himself in the whirl of destructive frenzy, he is carried off his feet by its intoxication. Conceit grows; he forgets that human nature has to be wooed; he thinks that it is enough to tear it up from its old moorings. Who cares what happens afterwards? Those who have not the patience to wait for human nature to come to terms in its own time believe in persecution; what they finally build up overnight by violence cannot be relied upon; it cannot support the burden of permanency.....

'Bolshevism originates in this inhuman background of modern civilization. It is like the storm which rushes in all fury flashing its lightning-teeth when the pressure is low in the atmosphere. This unnatural revolution has broken out because human society has lost its harmony. It is because the individual's contempt for the community had been growing that the suicidal proposal of sacrificing the individual in the name of collectivity has arisen. It is like proclaiming the sea to be the only friend when the

volcano is causing trouble on the shore. It is only when the real nature of this shoreless sea is known that one becomes impatient to get back to the shore. Man will never tolerate for all time the unreality of individual-less collectivity. The strongholds of greed in society must be conquered and controlled, but who will protect society, if the individual is to be banished for good? It is not improbable that in this age Bolshevism is the treatment, but medical treatment cannot be eternal; indeed the day on which the doctor's regime comes to an end must be hailed as the red-letter day for the patient.

'I pray for the victory of the co-operative principle in the production and control of the wealth of our villages, for it recognizes human nature in not scorning the desire and opinion of the co-operators. Nothing succeeds by antagonizing human nature.'

Tagore was a poet and therefore very susceptible to first impressions. When he went to Russia in 1930, he saw the nation engaged in a mighty constructive effort, whose fruits were being shared by the common man. He had all his life fought poverty, illiteracy and lethargy in his own land, and when he saw how all these had been abolished in Russia, almost at one stroke of magic, he could not help being impressed. Moreover, Russia at that time was not the powerful nation she is today of whom the small neighbouring states live in dread. She was misunderstood and more sinned against than sinning. The poet whose heart was always with the wronged had therefore an additional incentive to sympathy. Russia seemed to him an angel of light in a satanic world. He saw the happy faces of children in schools and was enchanted, he met peasants and workers who assured him that they

were masters of their destiny and he was delighted. Everywhere he felt the sweep of a great creative urge and, being a creative artist himself, was thrilled by it. He could not see the other side of the ledger. He visited no concentration camps and met no victims of the secret service. He did not live to see the Soviet Union 'engaged in creating a new era for Humanity' in other and less fortunate lands. He was happily spared the painful spectacle of the shameful role played by the Indian Communists during the terrible years after August, '42. It is doubtful if, were he living today, he would endorse his earlier statement that 'at least this nation of all others in the world is thinking of the interest of the whole humanity over and above the national interest.'

IV. LAST DAYS WITH GURUDEV *

Thoughts and feelings crowd in upon me in painful confusion as I look back over the last few weeks. It seems unbelievable that he from the warmth of whose presence we drew our inspiration, our strength, our joy, is no longer with us. We had taken that warmth for granted, as we take the warmth of the sun for granted—the sun after whom he was so appropriately named. Yet we knew that for all his god-like qualities, he was but mortal and would one day pass away; but being too human ourselves, the knowledge that the end was inevitable has in no way helped to abate the shock. Nor does the knowledge that the loss is common to the whole nation make it any the less for us.

As the mind revives and tries to readjust its poise, after the first impact of grief has subsided, swarms of memories, winged with a variety of sentiments, assail one. Wonder that so rare a being, at once majestic and exquisite, should actually have lived in our midst; gratefulness that we were privileged to be near it and to have listened to its great utterance; shame that we did not sufficiently strive to be worthy of that privilege; regret at innumerable opportunities lost, never to be recovered; anger at our own unworthiness; self-pity at our now orphaned state; and many other feelings that I cannot define.

* This article was written a few days after the poet's death (7th August, 1941), and was originally published in the Tagore Memorial Number of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*.

And yet indulgence in sorrow is not wholesome, and men must learn to subdue it without turning hard-hearted. He taught us that lesson over and over again, both by his noble words and by his own brave example. During the last few months, Death had snatched away, one after another, several of his dearest companions and associates. Charlie Andrews and Surendranath Tagore, Kalimohan Ghosh and Gourgopal Ghosh and that exquisite singer of his songs, 'Khuku'—he had loved them all and, while they lived, had constantly thought of them. (How touching it was to see him put aside important literary work and turn over the leaves of his books on Homeopathic or Biochemic medicines whenever he heard that one of us in the Ashram was ill!) But when news of each death was broken to him, he uttered not a word of complaint, withdrew into himself, and emerged unshaken, a tower of strength to us all.

But though we drew our strength from him to the last, it was most painful to watch him struggle with his own physical suffering. Only those who attended on him day and night during those days could have any idea of the ruthless siege which the forces of death were slowly laying round him, of the acute mental suffering, natural to a sensitive spirit, as he felt his marvellous instruments of sight and sound grow feeble from day to day. How poignant and true are the lines written on the day before the operation!

> 'Sorrow's dark night, again and again,
> Has come to my door.
> Its only weapon, I saw,
> Was pain's twisted brow, fear's hideous gestures
> Preluding its deception in darkness.

Whenever I have believed in its mask of dread,
    Fruitless defeat has followed.
This game of defeat and victory is life's delusion;
From childhood, at each step, clings this spectre,
    Filled with sorrow's mockery.
A moving screen of varied fears—
Death's skilful handiwork wrought in scattered gloom.'

And yet during the whole course of this illness, which had never really left him since the attack first laid him prostrate in September, 1940, not once did he betray signs of morbidity or despair, nor ever lose his keen interest in things and events in the world outside. How excited he was when told of Miss Rathbone's open letter to Indians. His physical condition was causing concern even at that time and we were quite frightened at his excitement as he dictated the reply. 'I do not care,' he said, 'what our British masters and their loyal henchmen in India will think or say about me. I must speak out what I feel. . . . .' And as he related how he had seen half-starved women and children stir up puddles of mud for a handful of drinking water, his voice broke down.

Deeply and passionately as he loved and felt for his own people, his love and interest were not confined to them. He brooded over the outcome of the present war and worried over the fate of the innocent millions of all nations who had been dragged into the war as its victims, for no fault of their own. In particular, his sympathies went out to the Chinese and the Russians. He had hopes that the great social experiments of the latter would one day change the face of civilization all over the earth. Though he rejected much that he found crude in the communist philosophy, he was greatly impressed by the spectacle of a civilization the benefits of whose achievements

were equally enjoyed by all its people. He wished the Russians well in the war and was depressed whenever he read of reverses on their front. Nor, despite his sympathy with the other side, did he ever think of the Germans and the Japanese as the sole and unmitigated villains of the drama. The world—he had never tired of repeating—was caught in a trap set by certain tendencies in modern civilization which were being encouraged and patronized by the governing classes in practically all countries of the world. The cure of the evil must be something more fundamental than merely exterminating this people or that.

In the midst of these big problems and of his own literary activity which did not cease till the day of the operation in Calcutta, he constantly thought of his beloved Santiniketan and its affairs, even the most trivial. How happy he looked when he was told that the general kitchen had been thoroughly renovated and considerably extended and that under a new manager both the cooking and the serving of food had also greatly improved! A few days before he left for Calcutta, he sent for a copy of *Subhashitaratna Bhandagaram* from the Library and himself marked the Sanskrit slokas (even though his eyes troubled him a great deal) and sent for Sj. Nitaibenode Goswami and explained to him how he wanted the slokas to be taught to the children. Nor did he forget to remind him of this the day before he left.

Suddenly he asked, 'Who is teaching Bengali in the School these days? I hope some one who truly loves literature and has a real sense of *ras*—and not a mere erudite pedant. The children must catch the feeling of the sound from the voice of the teacher.' He went on to explain how

he used to lose himself in joy when teaching little children. His voice became hoarse as he added, 'But I can no longer teach them myself, nor supervise.' Immediately he was annoyed with himself and murmured, 'I don't know how I have become so weak that I can hardly talk without my voice betraying me.'

He saw to it that jars of lozenges or boxes of chocolates were always kept in his room at hand for little boys and girls, who never went to his room without coming out with one. Not even pariah dogs were excluded from his kindliness. One of them managed to make himself an honoured inmate of Uttarayana by the simple process of seeking shelter under his chair. Each morning it would come and obstinately stand near him until he had touched its head with his hand, when it would either sit down near his chair or a little farther away. Nor did he forget to immortalize the dog in one of his poems.

His sense of humour never deserted him. His nurses and attendants will treasure as their greatest reward the kindly witticisms and pleasantries that he constantly exchanged with them. He could never get over his amusement at being fed on Glaxo, and would refer to himself as a 'Glaxo baby'. As he could take nourishment only in very small quantities which would gradually be increased, his amusement was very great when he was told one day that the dose he was being given was the same as for a two-month-old baby. Since then each time Glaxo was served, he would enquire, 'How many months old am I today?'

Next to children, I think, he loved the trees. During the summer vacation, when the scarcity of water in the wells had become a serious menace, he was much distressed

at the fate of the trees. 'Have you a *mahua* tree in your garden?' he would suddenly inquire. 'If not, then you must plant some. When they grow, you will find how Santhal women always gather under them.' He who was so reluctant to take any nourishment and would not touch the most carefully prepared delicacies—how eagerly and excitedly like a child he picked out and nibbled at a *jām* when a bunch of them was brought to him from 'his own tree' at the back of 'Shyamali'! He kept the bunch near him and would tempt others. 'Just taste one and see how sweet these my *jāms* are!'

And so the days passed. His fever rose higher each evening and the nights were less restful. The doctors came to the conclusion that he must be taken to Calcutta for further treatment. The decision upset him. 'Why can't I be allowed to die in peace? Haven't I lived enough?' When it was explained to him that there was every hope of the disease being brought under control, he grudgingly submitted, only murmuring, 'Perhaps I shall not see these trees again.'

Painfully vivid is the memory of the fateful morning of the day he was taken to Calcutta. He was sitting in the room upstairs, waiting to be carried downstairs to the bus. I went in and touched his feet. He looked up sadly and did not smile. '*Chollam*' (I go) was all he said, and then looked away. I shrank within myself, so ominous that simple word sounded. Slowly and carefully he was brought down and put on the bus. Marvellously beautiful he looked as he lay reclining inside, robed in a black gown, wearing dark glasses. As the bus moved forward, many suppressed their sobs, some clicked their cameras, but the great majority sang *Amader Santiniketan*. The

joyous spirit of that song and the superb beauty of the form within the bus cured the temporary morbidity of the spirit and revived and strengthened the hope that surely he would come back. Such a one could not die. On both sides of the road to the station men and women had gathered to catch a glimpse of the passing bus and, if lucky, of the face within. By the time he was comfortably lodged in the saloon car, we had regained our spirits and had almost come to believe that in a month's time he would again be in our midst at Santiniketan. Little did we realize that all we would bring back from Calcutta would be a handful of ash and a great load of sorrow.

V. OUR DEBT TO TAGORE

It is five years since Rabindranath Tagore passed away. He was born in 1861 when India lay prostrate at the feet of the British. The Great Mutiny had been ruthlessly quelled. The ancient ruling classes had been either wiped out or lay cringing in the dust. India had attained the peace of the desert. She had ceased to be creative. Politically she had lost her freedom, and culturally her soul. The age of toadies and reactionaries had begun, those who aped Western ways and those who sought consolation in the bondage of immemorial tradition and dogma.

Eighty years later, when Tagore died, the face of India had changed. Culturally she had recovered her self-respect, and politically she was about to launch the Great Rebellion of August, 1942. True, the credit for this political awakening must go mainly to the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. But political awakening and cultural consciousness do not grow in water-tight compartments. Their roots are linked together and are ultimately fed by a common stream of creative inspiration. Of this creative inspiration Tagore was as much a channel as Gandhi is in his own way. If Tagore had not lived India would still be a desert, though on the eve of political freedom.

Though Tagore was essentially a poet, he was more than a mere poet, as Gandhi is more than a mere politician. His genius enriched whatever it touched. Like the sun after which he was named (*Rabi* means the sun) he shed light and warmth on his age, vitalized the mental

and moral soil of his land, revealed unknown horizons of thought and spanned the arch that divides the East from the West. The vitality of his genius is truly amazing. No less amazing are the variety and beauty of the literary forms he created. He gave to his people in one life-time what other peoples have taken centuries to evolve—a language capable of expressing the finest modulations of thought and feeling, a literature worthy to be taught in any university in the world. There was no field of literary activity which was not explored and enriched by his daring adventures, and many of these were virgin fields in Bengali which his hands were the first to stir into fruitfulness. He is one of the world's few writers whose works withstand the challenge of the severest tests of great literature, Eastern or Western, ancient or modern.

Among modern writers he has the unique distinction that while even the most sophisticated Bengali intellectuals delight in his verse, while learned professors write volumes on them, the simple unsophisticated folk in the congested lanes of Calcutta or in the remote villages of Bengal sing his songs with rapture. Each change of the season, each aspect of Bengal's rich landscape, every undulation of the human heart, in sorrow or in joy, has found its voice in some song of his. The mute who have no creative expression of their own sing his songs and feel the weight of their dumbness relieved. All this, however, is true only for those in whose language he wrote and sang. Those who read him only in translations can have no conception either of the scope or the quality of his genius. To know him one must read him in Bengali and listen to his songs being sung. Then is one held by a double feeling of delight and awe. What to call him who

is unsurpassed as a lyric poet, whose dramatic dialogues have caught in immortal words the profoundest poses of human conflict, the grandeur and subtlety of whose religious verse is like the voice of the Upanishads quivering in accents of human intimacy, whose short stories place him alongside of Chekhov, and who is unique as the author of an inexhaustible stream of songs, as exquisite in their melody as in the words that embody it! 'He is a master, a master!' cried Turgeniev, at a loss for words to describe the genius of Tolstoy. Even so one is dumb-founded with a mixed feeling of wonder and joy at the magnificent outflow of Tagore's creative activity.

If Tagore had been nothing more than a mere poet, a singer of songs and a dreamer of dreams, he would still be remembered as one of the world's immortals. But he was something more. He was human and humane, a fully developed man, a harmonious personality. He was a lover of his people, a citizen with a conscience, a patriot whose loyalty embraced all mankind. All his life he pleaded and strove for social justice, for the right of the poor to material well-being, of the citizen to self-government, of the ignorant to knowledge, of the child to unfettered development, of the woman to equal dignity with man. The religion he preached was the religion of man, the renunciation he extolled was not of this world but of the base passions of cupidity and hatred, the freedom he fought for was not the freedom of one people to exploit another but the freedom of the human personality from all that stifles it, whether it be the tyranny of an external organization or the worse tyranny of man's own blind passion for power.

He was a pioneer in the field of national education. For forty years he was content to be a schoolmaster in humble village surroundings, even when he had achieved a fame that kings might envy. He was the first to think out for himself and put into practice principles of education that have now become commonplaces of educational theory, if not yet of practice. Today we all know that what the child imbibes at school is far more important than what he learns in college, that the teaching is unreal unless it is through the mother-tongue, that learning through activity is more real than learning through the written word, that true education lies in the training of all the senses instead of merely cramming the mind with memorized knowledge, that culture is something much more than mere academic knowledge, etc. But how many of our countrymen thought of it in 1901 when Tagore started his experiments in education? Gandhiji adopted the scheme of teaching through crafts years after Tagore had applied it in his schools at Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Even in the field of rural reconstruction, Tagore had made his first experiments before the Congress or any other national organization had taken to it seriously. If Tagore had done nothing else, what he did at Santiniketan and Sriniketan would be sufficient to rank him as one of India's greatest nation-builders.

Today we are obsessed with political issues. Like a sick man who thinks of nothing but his liver and believes that if only his liver could be put right, all would be well with the world, we think that if only we could install ourselves in the Viceregal Lodge and the Delhi Secretariat, all our misery would disappear overnight. We forget that with the achievement of independence will come our real test

of fitness for freedom. Hence Gandhiji's insistence on the constructive aspect of our national struggle which is a way not only of winning freedom but of mastering it. Hence also Tagore's *tapasya* to release the fountain of our creative energy which never fails to construct even when it destroys. Tagore was not a politician. He was not interested in wielding power over the lives of others, for good or for evil. But he had a clear and steady vision of man's destiny and unerring instinct for those first principles which if men and nations betray they perish at the root. How well he summed up in an aphorism the tragedy of power politics! 'The clumsiness of power spoils the key and uses the pickaxe.'

He had a very healthy contempt for mere agitational politics which he likened to an engine which continually whistles and throws out columns of smoke without ever moving. To the pilots of our ship of destiny his advice was: Fear not the waves of the sea, but mind the leaks in your own vessel. If today we are slaves, it is not because the British are devils but because we are weaklings. We have ceased to believe in ourselves. Instead of tapping the fountain of our own creative energy we are eternally picking rags from other peoples' dustbins. As early as 1906 he wrote: 'No one can take away the blessed task of service to the country—it is God given. Self-rule is eternally within our grasp. . . . . If we do not take up the work, we lose the right. It is all to our shame if we lose the natural right of service and throw blame on others for the non-discharge of our own duties. It is sad and unfortunate that while we ourselves refrain from service and sacrifice, we expect the mitigation of distress from those who do not feel the natural urge to love and serve but only

to throw favours out of pity.' This is the core of Gandhiji's philosophy as well, but we have only to glance at our daily newspapers to realize how little this truth is heeded by the great majority of our political orators and leader writers. If our little politicians do not heed Gandhiji's words, it is little surprising that they have forgotten that Tagore ever uttered them.

How are we to set our house in order? Tagore's answer was two-fold. Bridge the gulf between the cities and villages. Villages are the real reservoirs of our national strength. Bring back life to the village in its completeness. Make them self-reliant and strong, healthy and happy, rich with the consciousness of the cultural traditions of their own country and competent to make an efficient use of the modern resources for the improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic condition. Villages are the source of our national vitality. If they decay, the whole nation will degenerate, sooner or later. Second, remove the cancer of inequality and superstition from the body of our society. No political miracle can be built on the quicksands of social slavery. The same inertia which leads us to idolatry of dead forms in social institutions will create in our politics prison houses with immovable walls; the narrowness of sympathy which makes it possible for us to impose upon a considerable portion of humanity the galling yoke of inferiority will exert itself in our politics in creating the tyranny of injustice. Political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free.

> 'O my unfortunate country, those whom you have debased
> they shall drag you down to their own level
> till their shame is yours.

Those whom you have deprived of their human rights,
who stand before you but find no room in your lap,
they shall drag you down to their own level
till their shame is yours.'

India, said Tagore, treated life in all truth where it was manifold but insulted it where it was moving. Hence the glory of what we were and the shame of what we are. We who dared so adventurously in the realm of the mind failed to carry this spirit of experiment into the actual business of daily life. We were satisfied with the poise of stillness and did not strive for poise in movement. In other words, we failed to keep pace with the times and had to pay the inevitable penalty. Tagore had no illusions about what is called progress in Western countries, which has come to be synonymous with multiplication of luxuries and worship of mechanized living. By *progress* he meant a continuous development of the human personality, both individual and corporate. As he put it, 'I believe in life only when it is progressive; and in progress only when it is in harmony with life. I preach the freedom of man from the servitude of the fetish of hugeness, the non-human.' The real conflict, according to him, was not between the East and the West but between man and the machine, between personality and organization. Man needs both machine and organization, but they must be mastered and humanized by him instead of his being mechanized and dehumanized by them. 'Man's real danger,' he warned us, 'lies not in the risk of our material security but in the obscuration of man himself in the human world.'

Unlike many modern thinkers, Tagore had no blueprint for the world's salvation. He believed in no

particular 'ism'. He merely emphasized certain basic truths which men may ignore only at their peril. His thought will therefore never be out of date. He was what Gandhiji rightly termed the Great Sentinel. As a poet he will always delight, as a singer he will always enchant, as a teacher he will always enlighten. The world has reason to be grateful to one whose genius was so consistently dedicated to the good of humanity.

VI. NEHRU AND GANDHI

Two Faces of India in Transition

Among those who are making history in modern India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stands in a class by himself. Both as a political force to be reckoned with and as a personality to be admired he dominates the Indian scene, next only to Gandhi. As a political force he defies assessment; as a personality he challenges analysis. In India he is loved more than any one else save Gandhi. Outside India his reputation is said to surpass even that of Gandhi. His popularity, unlike that of most other Congress leaders, is not localized to his own province. He is a universal darling and collects admiring multitudes wherever he goes. All classes of people dote on him, the poor because he is their champion, the rich because he is an aristocrat. He impresses the learned with his writings and intoxicates the crowd with his rhetoric. Revolutionaries applaud his fiery eloquence, and fashionable society ladies adore his handsome appearance and his cultured conversation. Politically he symbolizes India's challenge to Europe, intellectually he represents India's debt to the West, spiritually he is torn between the two. The Indian masses idolize him, the European intellectuals admire him.

Unlike Gandhi, he is not an enigma to the European. He is not the mysterious East which baffles the West. A European feels ill at ease in Gandhi's presence. He feels the power of his personality, is even fascinated by it. He may even revere him as the image of Christ, and yet he

senses something uncanny about Gandhi. Gandhi is unpredictable. He is a power whose mechanism he does not understand, whose voltage he does not know. But with Jawaharlal the European feels at home. Here is some one who talks like him, thinks like the best of them. Nehru is cast in the heroic mould, the pattern of his idealism is familiar to the European. His faith is essentially secular, his values ethical, his thinking rational, his reactions predictable. He acts as a civilized man of the twentieth century may be expected to act.

To call Nehru un-Indian would be to misread the forces that are shaping modern India. India is not only what she has been for thousands of years, not only what her millions still are in the villages, but what she is struggling to be, what her awakened intelligentsia are aspiring to make her. This is not the first time in her history that the impact of an alien civilization has forced her out of her shell and obliged her to re-assess old values in terms of a changing world. Jawaharlal represents the spiritual confusion of an India that is still struggling to work out a new harmony, an India still in the birth-pangs of an unattained poise between the old and the new, an India not yet able to sift the real from the spurious. If he seems out of tune with India as she has been so far, it is because he is in tune with India as he would like her to become. He is not the only one to feel so. The bulk of the Indian intelligentsia is with him, with perhaps this difference that Nehru's upbringing and his early education in England have made this attitude more natural in his case. He knew the West long before he learnt to discover India. The discovery has been a long, arduous and painful process, but in the end it has come with a shock of joy, almost

reminiscent of Keats's Sonnet when he first read Chapman's Homer. He is like a child nursed by a stranger. It took him long to recognize his mother, and even now he has to make a conscious effort to feel at ease in his mother's lap.

Gandhi too represents India in transition, he too has been influenced by the West—but in a vastly different way. Nehru has approached India *via* the West, Gandhi looks at the West with Indian eyes. The one influences India from without, the other changes her from within. Both influences are necessary and healthy, so long as they do not cancel each other. Gandhi, though unique, is so Indian that he is almost India herself. He is what we Hindus would call an *Avatār*, an incarnation of her genius. The five thousand years of India's *tapasya* are in his blood. He is so intimately in tune with her spirit that his very 'mediaevalism' has a way of becoming more modern than Nehru's modernism. It answers India's need more effectively and she responds immediately. What he takes from the West—and in his own way he has taken almost as much as any other Indian—is immediately Indianized in his hands. As a creative artist when he borrows a theme or a phrase from a foreign literature immediately makes it his own, so Gandhi imparts to whatever he borrows from abroad such vitality and individuality that the West will have to borrow it back from him one day. In other words, Gandhi whether as a revolutionary or as a statesman is a supreme creative artist. That is why he makes India, while Nehru discovers her. And that is why he can be best understood only by his own people who follow the idiom of his action. Foreigners have to translate it into their own medium which is ill-

suited to the rhythm of an alien genius. To them Gandhi seems a reactionary, a mediaevalist, an enemy of progress, at best an eccentric saint, at worst a slippery politician.

But Nehru seems simple and straight, easy to understand and worthy to be admired. He does not baffle the foreigner. The European, the American, the Chinese, they all understand him. He might have been one of them. Nehru represents virtues which are not un-Indian but which are not peculiarly Indian, virtues common to all great civilizations. He might have been born, and would have been what he is, in any of the great civilized countries of the world. He would have been honoured anywhere. In times of political stress, he would have been a hero of his people, defying insolent might and defending justice and liberty. In times of peace and prosperity, he would have made himself felt as an eminent liberal intellectual, deprecating greed and vulgarity and stressing the finer values of life. He is a type of whom any people would be justly proud, whose memory would be saluted by decent men and women of all nations.

Nehru occupies a unique position in the world of Indian politics. As a leader he has achieved more greatness than power, and commands more adulation than allegiance. As a politician he is able but not yet effective. He dominates but does not direct events. He is the beloved of his people but not their master. His strength lies in the strategic position he occupies between divergent forces. Though not a Gandhi-ite, he enjoys the love and confidence of the Mahatma as perhaps no one else does. The elder politicians value his loyalty, their younger rivals applaud his audacity. The Rightists find him indispensable,

the Leftists amenable. He is aggressive enough for the nationalists, and international enough for the Communists, reasonable enough for the capitalists and radical enough for the Socialists. His choice as President of the Indian National Congress was welcomed by all sections of the people. He is identified with no group in the Congress. All groups may therefore partially claim him as their own. His revolutionary ardour is challenged by none, his disinterestedness and the innate magnanimity of his soul are trusted by all. He is incapable of meanness, of betraying the larger interest for the sake of a narrow, sectional loyalty. He may be betrayed but he will never betray. He thinks for himself, and though he may yield to the superior wisdom of Gandhi or to the discipline of corporate action, he will not use language not his own. He is ready to see another's point of view, a virtue rare in a revolutionary. He tolerates dissent and obliges enemies, virtues fatal in a politician.

No wonder that this idol of the millions is a very lonely figure. Beneath the overflow of his robust vitality, his perennial youthfulness, his seeming aggressiveness and confidence, is an undercurrent of sadness, of doubt and hesitancy, obvious to any sensitive student of his writings. He stands on the bridge between the old and the new, between the dying and the unborn, between repose and hysteria, and has found his home on neither shore. He is loved but not followed, he is respected but not obeyed. He is a leader who does not control the party. He has to argue and remonstrate. He cannot command. He is a general without an army of his own. Foreigners call him the uncrowned king of India. In fact, he wears the crown but does not hold the sceptre. Those who follow

him owe allegiance to others. He is a leader who is more led than leading. And yet he is no puppet, for he is a host in himself. He has more influence than any one else save Gandhi, but unlike Gandhi, his influence is vague, amorphous and has not crystallized into power. He is human and therefore presumably not without ambition. But he is too noble to covet power for its own sake. He has therefore preferred glory to power. Nor has he reached that stage which only Gandhi has attained, where power should flow to him without his seeking it.

His influence is essentially moral. It is the cumulative result of his courage, his sacrifice, his breadth of outlook and the innate nobility of his character. A peculiar combination of seemingly contradictory virtues has invested his personality with a rare appeal. He is explosive in speech and disciplined in action, impulsive in gestures, deliberate in judgement, self-assertive in little acts, self-effacing in big deeds, revolutionary in aim and conservative in loyalty, passionate when he advocates a cause and fair when he denounces one. He is reckless of personal peril and cautious where the welfare of his nation is at stake. Loving the good things of life, he is indifferent to personal pleasure. He raises others to power and grabs none for himself. He is at once personal and detached, human and aloof, with the result that now he appears fond, now cold, now proud, now modest. An aristocrat in love with the masses, a nationalist who represents the culture of the foreigner, an intellectual caught in the maelstrom of an emotional upheaval—the very paradox of his personality has surrounded it with a halo.

What does he believe in—this man who is romantic by temperament, a materialist by conviction, an idealist by

choice, a humanist by sympathy? What is his faith, where from does he derive his moral strength? He does not care for religion, though he has written eloquently of the Upanishads in his *Discovery of India*. The appreciation is intellectual and derived, not direct and personal. He is no spiritual genius, no moral mystic, like Gandhi. No daemon from within drives him to seek the key to life's mystery outside the context of man's social destiny. No Hound from Heaven dogs his steps. He serves his people not because he sees God in man but because he is wise enough to understand that his own destiny is interlinked with theirs. The spiritual incentive of his patriotism is pride. He fights the foreigner because he is too proud to endure servility. He is a democrat because he is too high-souled to seize power for himself unless assured of his moral right to it. Allied to pride is the impulse of an ardent and generous heart. He is a Socialist because he is impatient of individualist greed and capitalist waste and too generous not to wish to share the good things of life with all men. He believes in Gandhi, partly because he is modest and truthful enough to acknowledge a force greater than his own and partly because of the innate moral cleanliness of his instincts which have shown him the wisdom of choosing good means for good ends. In other words, his creed, if creed it can be called, is that of a refined and humane materialism.

He is, as he calls himself in his latest book, 'pagan with a pagan's liking for the exuberance of life and nature, and not very much averse to the conflicts that life provides'. The challenge of life thrills him but the vulgarity of man's blind response sickens him. He is vital and sensitive and therefore cannot escape the torment of

passion and pain. The call of the battle tingles his blood, the hero in him itches to draw the sword and to plunge into the fray, regardless of consequences. But when he closes his eyes, his spirit is haunted by the image of the Buddha, 'seated on the lotus flower, calm and impassive, above passion and desire, beyond the storm and strife of this world, so far away he seems, out of reach, unattainable'. He wonders, cannot the two be reconciled—the call of life and the call of the spirit? He looks again at the image of the Buddha and discovers that 'behind those still, unmoving features there is a passion and an emotion, strange and more powerful than the passions and emotions we have known. His eyes are closed, but some power of the spirit looks out of them and a vital energy fills the frame. The ages roll by and Buddha seems not so far away after all; his voice whispers in our ears and tells us not to run away from the struggle, but calm-eyed, to face it, and to see in life ever greater opportunities for growth and advancement.' He looks around for evidence of such reconciliation today and he recognizes it in Gandhi, the calm-eyed revolutionary, who can fight without hating, who is ever on the march and ever in repose, in whose blood burns the fire of Shivaji, and who is compassionate like the Buddha. And so Nehru the pagan turns a lover of Gandhi and sheathes his sword of steel to follow the sword of gold.

He is striving for a world where private greed will be reconciled with public good, individual liberty with collective enterprise, national interest with international peace. How exactly such a society will be attained he does not know. He believes that men can be persuaded with rational argument and their actions governed by enlightened

self-interest. He sees his own image in other men. The irrational, the mystic, the incalculable in human affairs exasperates and eludes him. He is vaguely aware of its power but does not understand its dynamics. He knows that Gandhi knows the secret and can wield the mysterious power. He is therefore content to follow the Mahatma even when he fails to understand his logic. His loyalty to Gandhi is true and tested, and Gandhi's love for him deep and abiding. Each reinforces the other. Nehru without Gandhi would be ineffective, and Gandhi without Nehru incomplete. When he differs from Gandhi, he says so. The orthodox look askance at him, the heretics cheer him. But the rift between Gandhi and Nehru never appears. The two understand each other. This understanding is a measure of Gandhi's greatness and of Nehru's wisdom. It is the biggest asset of the Indian National Congress.

VII. ROMAIN ROLLAND

The Greatest European since Tolstoy

He strove, he sought, he did not find, but he did not yield—is the keynote of almost all that Romain Rolland wrote and did. This epitaph sums up the glory and the tragedy of his life. Both as man and as artist he fought for causes that he lived to see desecrated, mangled and mutilated. The world he sought and strove to build with all the labour and fire of his genius lay at his death a blasted heap of ruins. He who swore, 'I will not rest', now rests for ever. The great architect of European symphony lived to hear the tumult of hell on earth. Amid the shrieks and howls of the battlefield his voice was drowned. Its accents of love and wisdom were lost in a cacophony of despair and hate.

But though to the cynic it may seem that he beat his wings in vain, the future shall draw light from the spark of faith that he preserved in solitary, tragic splendour. Seeming to fail, he has left behind an earnest of victory to come. There is no defeat for him who could say: 'I sought not peace; I sought life. I knew man and loved him. I believed in his greatness. To defend that greatness on earth was my mission. In our unsullied defeat my faith looms more richly and gloriously than before. I have outstripped victory, and that is my victory. We were a handful, and though we could not save others we have saved our faith. We have scattered seeds which shall sprout and grow.'

He was the true spiritual heir of Tolstoy. As that great Russian towered over Europe and spoke across the frontiers of race and nationality, so this Frenchman, though he might not have towered so high, spoke not for his own people alone, but addressed all mankind. His internationalism was not a fashion, as it is with most intellectuals. It was a faith by which he lived and for which he suffered.

In 1887 when Rolland, having finished his academic course at the Normal School, was yet undecided about his career and was wavering between his passion for music and art and his moral idealism, he received a letter from Tolstoy which exercised a lasting influence on his future life. That alone is of value, wrote the sage of Yasnaya Polyana, which binds men together! The only artist who counts is the artist who makes a sacrifice for his convictions. The precondition of every true calling must be, not love for art, but love for mankind. Those only who are filled with such a love can hope that they will ever be able as artists to do anything worth doing. This letter was for Rolland an initiation in a faith to which he remained true all his life.

'Our first duty is to be great and to defend greatness on earth,' says the hero of one of his earliest plays, *The Triumph of Reason*. This was Rolland's mission in life as a writer. It explains both his greatness and his limitation as an artist. He was not content to be a mere spectator of men and events; he aspired to be a moral leader. He had an artist's sensibility, a historian's perspective and a saint's conscience. Hence his books inspire even more than they entertain. His biographies are as fascinating as his novels, and his novels, like *John Christopher* and *The*

Soul Enchanted, read like biographies of heroic spirits in whom we may recognize some of our great predecessors or contemporaries. 'What distinguishes Romain Rolland from others,' wrote his eminent contemporary and biographer, Stefan Zweig, 'is that in art he never creates anything isolated, anything with a purely literary or casual scope. Invariably his efforts are directed towards the loftiest moral aims; he aspires towards eternal forms; strives to fashion the monumental. His goal is to produce a fresco, to paint a comprehensive picture, to achieve an epic greatness. . . . . His creative imagination is attracted solely by elemental phenomena, by the great *courants de foi*, whereby with mystical energy a single idea is suddenly carried into the minds of millions of individuals; whereby a country, an epoch, a generation, will become kindled like a firebrand, and will shed light over the environing darkness. He lights his own poetic flame at the great beacons of mankind, be they individuals of genius or inspired epochs, Beethoven or the Renaissance, Tolstoy or the Revolution, Michelangelo or the Crusades.'

It is not for us to sit in judgement on Rolland's merits as a literary artist. That is the privilege of his literary compatriots in whose language he wrote or of the professional critics of European literature. We can only say that to us, foreigners, no figure in European literature since Tolstoy has seemed more worthy of admiration and respect than Romain Rolland. Just as to foreign readers Tagore's *Gitanjali* is more significant than his other literary achievements, whatever the Bengali critics might say, even so do Tolstoy and Rolland seem more significant to us than, say, Marcel Proust or James Joyce, over whom so many European critics and their disciples

in India go into ecstasies. No doubt, the Russian master towers high above his French disciple, but no book since *War and Peace* has revealed to us the elemental strength, the spiritual potentiality of the European soul so vividly, so movingly and so convincingly as *John Christopher.* Other books may have delved more realistically into the tortuosities of the European mind, but none has built a better monument to its grandeur. '*John Christopher,*' in the words of a critic who was himself a literary artist of genius, 'was designed to be, and actually is, a work of life and not a work of art; it was to be, and is, a book as comprehensive as humanity; for art is life broken in. . . . . In one work alone, Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* had Rolland encountered a similar conjuncture of a historical picture of the world with a process of inner purification and a state of religious ecstasy. Here only had he discerned the like passionate sense of responsibility towards truth. But Rolland diverged from this splendid example by placing his tragedy in the temporal environment of the life of today, instead of amid the wars of Napoleonic times; and by endowing his hero with the heroism, not of arms, but of the invisible struggles which the artist is constrained to fight. Here, as always, the most human of artists was his model, the man to whom art was not an end in itself, but was ever subordinate to an ethical purpose. In accordance with the spirit of Tolstoy's teaching, *John Christopher* was not to be a literary work, but a deed. For this reason, Rolland's great symphony cannot be subjected to the restrictions of a convenient formula. The book ignores all the ordinary canons, and is nonetheless a characteristic product of its time. Standing outside literature, it is an overwhelmingly powerful literary manifestation. Often

enough it ignores the rules of art, and is yet a most perfect expression of art. It is not a book, but a message; it is not a history, but is nevertheless a record of our time. More than a book, it is the daily miracle of revelation of a man who lives the truth, whose whole life is truth.'

Whilst Tolstoy's genius was supremely creative, Rolland's was more interpretative than creative. He might be best described as a creative interpreter of the creative spirit of Europe. Others have dug deeper into the profundities, perversities or subtleties of the European mind, but none has painted better the primal energy and heroism of its creative spirit. Through his books one learns to respect Europe, and to believe that what the barbarism of Europe has destroyed today, the constructive genius of Europe will build again. Above all one realizes that the spirit of man is the same everywhere, though in the west it has to fight materialism and cynicism, in the east lethargy and superstition. Beethoven, Tolstoy, John Christopher, Oliver, Vivekananda, Gandhi, each in his own way is a manifestation and a vindication of this spirit. 'There is neither east nor west for the naked soul; such things are merely its trappings. The whole world is its home. And as its home is in each one of us, it belongs to all of us.'

Romain Rolland made Europe's greatness known to us and strove to make known to Europe India's greatness—the land, as he called it, of glory and of servility, of impermanent empires but of eternally glorious thoughts. It is indeed surprising that this foreigner, who never visited this land, should have written the best biographies we have of Shri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote his little life of Gandhi in 1923, years

before he first met him and before even Gandhiji's Autobiography was published. At a time when, during and after the first non-co-operation movement, Tagore and Gandhi seemed to be drifting apart and were challenging each other in a public controversy, came this foreigner who with his light of understanding and his genius for interpretation broke through the fog of misunderstanding and revealed the greatness of each to the other. He analysed the genius of each and showed that, despite the vast differences in their outlook, how deeply akin were their spirits and their missions. 'O Tagore! O Gandhi! rivers of India, who, like the Indus and the Ganges, encircle in your double embrace the east and the west—the latter, Mahatma, master of self-sacrifice and of heroic action—the former a vast dream of light—both issuing from God Himself, on this world tilled by the ploughshare of Hate.'

It was the horror of the first World War that drew Rolland to India. As is well known, he had refused to take sides in the war. He saw clearly that passion could not kill passion, that hatred and violence only produced more hatred and violence. He therefore condemned the aggressors in all camps. Raising his voice 'above the battle' from his neutral retreat in Switzerland, he called upon the artists, scientists and intellectuals of all lands to refrain from betraying the cause of humanity to suit the interests of their governments. Though disowned, abused and maligned by his countrymen in France, he stuck to his faith resolutely and almost alone.

He never blamed the people, for the masses are blind in their hatreds and in their worships. He admired their heroism on the battlefield and their enthusiastic sacrifice

of everything for what they believed to be their cause. 'O young men that shed your blood for the thirsty earth with so generous a joy!' he wrote in his famous manifesto, *Above the Battle* (Sept. 22, 1914), 'O heroism of the world! What a harvest for destruction to reap under this splendid summer sun! Young men of all nations, brought into conflict by a common ideal, all of you, marching to your deaths, are dear to me.' Turning to the leaders of the nations, he asked, 'For what are you squandering them, these living riches, these treasures of heroism entrusted to your hands? What ideal have you held up to the devotion of these youths so eager to sacrifice themselves?'

No one heeded him then. But when the war was over and the peace that followed had betrayed the hopes that the war had raised, men recalled Rolland's words and admired his prophetic wisdom and his moral heroism. 'In the darkest period that our race has ever known, you held aloft the light of truth,' wrote John Haynes Holmes to him in 1926. 'When men went mad, you remained sane. When hatred swept the earth with storm, you preserved within your heart an abode of peace to which as a refuge the free spirits of the world repaired.'

'Hail to a man who did not hate during the years of hatred! Romain Rolland!' cried Charles Trevelyan. And H. G. Wells wrote: 'There is scarcely a man in the world I respect more than I do you, not merely because of your great literary achievement but because of your unswerving devotion to the doctrine of human kindliness.'

These and a thousand other tributes poured in when the world had regained its sanity for a brief interlude during the two wars. But they came years later. When Rolland fought, he fought alone. Both psychologically

and physically he was isolated and shunned, for no spot is more dangerous than between the two fronts.

But unknown to him, and far removed from the storm-centre of Europe, another great and free spirit was feeling the same anguish and voicing the same warning. At that time Tagore and Rolland had not known each other, had never met. Little did they know that each had in the other in the utmost degree a kindred spirit, though a whole world separated them. The last Great War was essentially a European war. India felt no direct impact of its cataclysm, though indirectly she had to be bled and drained as part of Britain's dominions. The Indian poet need not have felt any great concern at what was happening thousands of miles away. And yet, as C. F. Andrews tells us, 'It was in the month of May, in the year 1914, when the first great mental agony came to the poet on account of some impending disaster to humanity, which his own spirit vaguely felt to be almost immediately imminent. After a time of acute suffering, which was like the suffering of death, his first premonition passed away; but again in the latter part of June, in that very same year, and during the early part of July, this sense of immediate disaster increased with him. He wrote at this time, in Bengali, one of the most striking of his short poems, called *The Destroyer*.

> 'Is it the Destroyer who comes?
> For the boisterous sea of tears heaves
> in the flood-tide of pain.

'In August, the desolating struggle between France and Germany began. All through the early days of the war, Rabindranath's own suffering was intense. He went away

into solitude and wrote Bengali poems dealing with the subjects of the world's disaster. One was called *The Trumpet*; another was called the *Oarsman*. In the latter he pictures the iniquity of the world as now came to the full.

> 'All the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks:
> Yet, oarsmen, take your places with the blessings or sorrow in your souls.
> Whom do you blame, brothers? Bow your heads down!
> The sin has been yours and ours.
> The heat growing in the heart of God for ages,
> The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong,
> The greed of fat prosperity, the rancour of the wronged pride of race, and insult to man
> Has burst God's peace, raging in storm.'

Was it a mere accident that the two finest literary geniuses of their age were also the most passionate champions of humanity? What Stefan Zweig has said of Rolland applies with equal force to Tagore as well. 'He has rescued for us another faith, that of the imaginative writer as the spiritual leader, the moral spokesman of his own nation and of all nations. . . . . One great man who remains human can for ever and for all men rescue our faith in humanity.'

Here were artists in the truest sense of the term, who created beauty out of their love of truth; here were musicians who drew harmony not only from sweet sounds and airs, but who strove for that ultimate harmony, the music of the soul, which will 'enrich the whole world with the sense of love and witch the heart out of things evil.' For them there was but one delight, that of creation. There

was 'but one heroism on earth—to know life and yet to love it'.

Tagore's patriotism, ardent and steadfast, is writ large in the history of Indian nationalism. From his earliest utterances, long before the Indian National Congress was founded, to his last Birthday Message in 1941, they form an immortal record of impassioned devotion to his people. To a people insulted and injured at every step, thwarted in every expression of national life, deprived of everything that makes life worth living, the only luxury seems self-delusion, the only form of self-respect the hatred of the oppressor. But not once did this poet encourage any such weakness in his countrymen. 'Make us strong that our worship may flower in love and bear fruit in work' was his *India's Prayer* recited by him at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1917. Not unoften his exhortations won him the hostility of his countrymen, as when he had the temerity to protest against Gandhiji's advocacy of the bonfire of foreign cloth. Gandhiji was great enough not to misjudge the motive of the Great Sentinel, but lesser men did.

Far more misunderstood than Tagore was Rolland by his own people. He loved his country deeply and passionately, but he loved the soul of France more than the glory of her arms, and, above all, he loved truth more than the lies men glorify in the name of their country. 'Truth is the same to all nations,' he said, 'but each nation has its lies which it speaks of as its idealism.' Loyalty to truth is loyalty to Fatherland, and not vice versa, as politicians would have men believe. 'A great nation has not only its frontiers to protect; it must also protect its good sense. It must protect itself from

the hallucinations, injustices, and follies which war lets loose.'

'I wish France to be loved,' he wrote. 'I wish France to be victorious; not through force; not solely through right (even that would be too harsh); but through the superiority of a great heart. I wish France were strong enough to fight without hatred; strong enough to regard even those whom she must strike down as her brothers, as erring brothers.' The beautiful, passionate words he put into the mouth of Oliver in *John Christopher* were such as a Gandhi might have uttered. 'I love France, but I cannot for the sake of France kill my soul or betray my conscience. This would be to betray my country. How can I hate when I feel no hatred? How can I truthfully act the comedy of hate? . . . . . I will not hate. I will be just even to my enemies. Amid all the stresses of passion, I wish to keep my vision clear, that I may understand everything and thus be able to love everything.'

Rolland had been impressed by Tagore's lectures on Nationalism delivered in Japan in 1916 and had immediately recognized in him a kindred spirit—one who like him was 'above the battle', where greed, hatred and violence masquerading under high-sounding names, lead the frenzied masses to brutal slaughter, and yet not out of the battle where the spirit defends its banner against the unreason and darkness. He had translated portions of these lectures into French and had used them in his famous articles during the war. Now he wrote to the poet asking him if he would add his signature to the Declaration of Independence of the Spirit which Rolland had drafted on behalf of the artists and intellectuals. 'I could wish that henceforth the intellect of Asia might

take a more definite part in the manifestation of the thought of Europe. My dream will be that one day we may see the union of these two hemispheres of the spirit; and I admire you for having contributed towards this more than anyone else.'

Tagore gave his signature. The contact once established grew. In a letter dated 26th August, 1919, Rolland expressed his sentiment more freely. 'The reading of *Nationalism* has been a great joy for me; for I entirely agree with your thoughts, and I love them even more now that I have heard them expressed by you with this noble and harmonious wisdom which, being your own, is so dear to us. It gives me profound pain (and, I might say, remorse, if I did not consider myself a human being rather than a European) when I consider the monstrous abuses which Europe makes of her power, this havoc of the universe, the destruction and debasement of so much material and moral wealth of the greatest forces on earth which it would have been in her interest to defend and to make strong by uniting them to her own. The time has come to react. It is not only a question of justice, it is a question of saving humanity. After the disaster of this shameful World War which marked Europe's failure, it has become evident that Europe alone cannot save herself. Her thought is in need of Asia's thought, just as the latter has profited from contact with Europe's thought. These are the two hemispheres of the brain of mankind. If one is paralysed, the whole body degenerates. It is necessary to re-establish their union and their healthy development.'

It is India's misfortune that Romain Rolland never visited this land. In a letter dated 11th June, 1923, he

wrote to Tagore: 'Dear Friend, how much I would like to come and see you in India! All the movements of my mind tend towards that direction. I fear I shall not be able to carry out this plan this winter..... But I hope for a voyage to Asia and a stay at Santiniketan. I have so much to learn from you! And I believe that I shall have there a mission to fulfil—a predetermined duty till the end of my life. The union of Europe and Asia must be, in the centuries to come, the most noble task of mankind. As for myself, India from now on is not a foreign land, she is the greatest of all countries, the ancient country from which once I came. I find her again deep inside me.' What a pity that this land, which has become the happy hunting ground of almost every adventurer, never had the privilege of receiving in its midst this great European!

In one of his letters, Rolland writes of his book on Gandhiji: 'I have just finished a pretty long essay on Mahatma Gandhi, based on the volume of collected articles in *Young India*. I shall have it published in the review *Europe*, as well as in several German and Russian reviews. .....I have conceived for the man Gandhi himself and his great heart burning with love, an infinite love and veneration. In a chapter of my essay I have taken the liberty, according to your admirable published essays, of recalling the position which you have taken up with regard to Gandhi, and the noble debate of ideas which has been evoked between you. The highest human ideals are confronted therein. One is reminded of a controversy between a St. Paul and a Plato. But transported to India, its horizons have expanded. They embrace the whole earth, and the whole of humanity joins in this august dispute. In my conclusion I have shown you united in

the feeling for the beauty (and even for the fruitful necessity) of the sacrifice of self through love. It may gratify you to know that your thought is the nearest to mine, that I feel actually in the world and that the soul of India, as expressed by your luminous spirit and the ardent heart of Gandhi, is for me a larger native land, in which my limbs stretch themselves free from the bonds of fanatical Europe which have bruised them.'

The letters continued till 1940. As though impelled by an unconscious desire to share with his people their greatest trial of suffering and humiliation, Romain Rolland had left Switzerland and returned to his native land before the present war came upon Europe. How he faced the trial during the dark days of the German occupation of France we do not know. One day when the facts are published we shall know how this champion of freedom, peace and non-violence reacted to the challenge of terror and violence. In the meanwhile all we have is the last letter he wrote to Tagore shortly before his country was overrun by the Nazis. It is a touching letter, dated 27th February, 1940, Vezelay (Yonne). 'The war has created a solitude around us..... Unable to write in the newspapers, which the state of war does not permit, I work and write for happier days. I re-live and try to fix on paper my memories of the past century—the days of my youth, and the first struggles before 1900. I hope you are keeping good health and that your days and nights are bathed in the sacred flame of poetry. In a world handed over to blind violence and falsehood, we must preserve within us truth and peace.'

These letters evoke contrary feelings. Listening to this intimate converse of the great, one is exalted by the

fervour of their faith. On the other hand the thought that the wise are helpless in a world ruled by the foolish is depressing enough. There is something tragic about the lives of the truly great. No one was more aware of it than Romain Rolland. It is this tragic element that sobers our mind and induces our reverence and awe. For they suffer that we might live. Tagore who sang so rapturously of the beauty, joy and wonder of life, was no less conscious of the grandeur of suffering. Only a few months before his death he wrote:

> 'Trampling embers underfoot
> To reach the limit of sorrow—
> Is there anywhere such quest, nameless, radiant
> Such pilgrimage together, from road to road?
> Such pure waters of service, breaking through igneous rocks,
> Such endless store of love?'

VIII. A GREAT ENGLISHMAN *

It is a noteworthy fact that at a time when Indian Nationalism is fighting an open, though non-violent, battle with the forces of British Imperialism, the people of this country should spontaneously and reverently observe the death-anniversary of an Englishman. It is doubtful if in his own country the memory of this great Englishman is being cherished with the same affection and respect. Yet Charlie Andrews was as true an Englishman as ever lived and a better patriot than most of them. He won battles for his country on the only field where the fruits of victory are not poisoned by hatred. He helped to build in the hearts of Indians a regard for the character of the Englishman that decades of bitter disillusionment have not succeeded in demolishing. Long after the rising flood of Indian Nationalism has swept away all the trophies that Clives and Curzons won for Britain in India, Indians will continue to honour the race that could produce so noble a specimen as C. F. Andrews.

Many Englishmen feel 'benevolently' towards this country, but there is mingled with this 'benevolence' a consciousness of superiority which gives to their attitude a patronizing air, far less welcome to us than the downright opposition of a Churchill or a Hoare. But Andrews's love was free from any such taint. He loved India and her people and served them for their own sake, and not

* This article was originally written for the Special Number published by the *Hindusthan Standard* on the first anniversary of C. F. Andrews's death.

merely to register his virtues as a good Christian. His love was spontaneous and his service sincere, which is why spontaneous gratitude marks his memory today all over this country. He never imagined that he was conferring a privilege on Indians by being one of them nor ever counted his service as a return for the wrongs they suffered at the hands of his countrymen. He knew fully well that no individual Englishman can ever hope to make adequate amends for all that his nation had done to India. No British charity in India can be anything but a misnomer. It is at best a niggardly repayment of an infinitesimal portion of our own wealth. But genuine love, offered in humility and proved in little acts of unselfish service, is something to be grateful for in any age and clime. Such love was Andrews's and he shared it equally with his own country and with ours and thereby built a bridge between the two which will survive the achievement of India's complete independence of British control.

Though one of us, Andrews never ceased to belong to his own people. By dedicating his life to India's cause, he never betrayed the true interests of his people. In fact, by allying himself with the oppressed, he most truly upheld the best traditions of his race. If his faith was misunderstood in his land, if his mission was misinterpreted as a betrayal of his people's cause, that only shows how far his people had deviated from their best intellectual heritage. In a letter, dated October 5, 1913, to Rabindranath Tagore, Andrews wrote: 'I am, and shall always be, an Englishman, through and through; but I am sure we must pass these boundary lines of nationality where truth stares us in the face, which is universal, and

greater even than country.' He was often insulted and once even beaten by one of his own race. But his faith survived such wrongs and insults and he never wavered in his love of his native land or that of his adoption. Like a true lover he grieved intensely whenever he came across an act or instance which belied his noble conception of England's true destiny and her proper relation with India. As a mother feels ashamed when the child misbehaves, so this great lover of his people grieved and suffered as he watched his compatriots at work in this land. Let me quote a few more lines from another of his letters written to Tagore, about the same time. 'I could not share your life without feeling the confinement of the narrow walls of my own. And this instinct, as I have told you, has grown stronger and I want to be true to it, for I feel it is leading me higher. I think I wrote to you that I had told Dr S— what was in my mind. I told him how my views of Christianity had widened, and how also I wished to come closer to Indians themselves, who had given me their affection. I was very hurt by his answer, especially at the implication that the affection which I had received from you and others was no deeper than a very selfish bias. The sentence also about my being "less than just" to my own countrymen tells its own tale. I am—I felt it last year—more or less of a political outcast in England (as I have been also out here) and must take the consequences and not expect to be understood on this side.'

But he never turned bitter and to the last retained his kindly humour. There is a delightful description in the first of the two letters quoted above of some of his Australian co-passengers on board the R. M. S. MEDINA, which is worth quoting.

'The passengers are all thoroughgoing Australians with a strong cockney accent and White Australia in their brain. One poor lady next to me at table looked so shocked when I told her we lived with Indians. We were evidently queer, uncanny creatures—neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring. Indeed we are not quite safe and scarcely respectable..... Our Bengali slippers are looked upon with grave suspicion as showing our un-English tendencies. In one of our joint efforts to be conversational we were explaining that India differed from Central Africa and announced that you had won the Nobel Prize, stating its terms in cash. One of them said, "My! think of that!" Another said, "Did he go on the bust?" And a third said, "You don't mean to tell me that he's a full-blooded native?" We assured him gravely that you were and he answered, "My! you don't say so. Think of that now!"....'

Rabindranath Tagore once said that having known Andrews, he could not help respecting the religion and the race that could fashion such a soul. Ordinarily it would be excusable if the ordinary Indian were cynical of the worth of Christian professions, seeing how the so-called Christian peoples, not content with devouring non-Christian races, were busy exterminating one another. If despite such overwhelming evidence in favour of cynicism, the average Indian continues to respect Christianity, it is because of such rare souls as Andrews, the beauty of whose lives blinds with its radiance the sneering eye of criticism. Andrews proved by his life that a true Christian is a noble specimen of humanity and that an Englishman when cured of the disease of imperialist greed can be the best of men. Such is the debt that his countrymen owe

to the memory of this great Englishman—a debt, alas! that the great majority of them are hardly in a mood to appreciate, much less acknowledge. But Andrews was also one of us and we in India will continue to honour his memory, whatever be its fate in the land of his birth. He loved us, lived with us and gave us his best. He preferred sharing the wrongs of the victims to sharing the spoils of the victors at home. He spoke for us and was one of the first to put forth India's case for complete independence from British tutelage. Above all he taught us the beauty of a life that has conquered its lust for possession, that has freed itself from national egoism, and has learnt to love man as man. An Indian friend once interpreted his initials, C. F. A. as Christ's Faithful Apostle. A more faithful apostle of Christ never came to India.

IX. ROTHENSTEIN AND INDIA*

One by one the old stalwarts pass away. England will remember Sir William Rothenstein as a distinguished artist, a judicious critic and a writer of literary merit. His portraits and drawings will be treasured by art museums on both sides of the Atlantic, and his Memoirs will delight readers for generations to come. An accomplished artist, he wielded both pen and brush with equal dexterity. Unlike many artists, he had culture as well as talent. His intellectual sensibility, his large-hearted sympathies and his capacity for friendship brought him wide and valuable contacts which he has so charmingly described in his three volumes of Memoirs.

Indians will remember him for his keen and sympathetic interest in Indian art and for his life-long friendship with Rabindranath Tagore. He it was who introduced Tagore to Yeats and to other literary men of England whose enthusiasm encouraged Tagore to consent to the publication of *Gitanjali*. He it was who proposed to the India Society to publish *Gitanjali* which brought the Poet fame in Europe and the award of the Nobel Prize. We may take for granted that in trying to make Tagore known to his countrymen Rothenstein did not have a very smooth and ready path. There were—as there still are—powerful elements in English public life who would resent publicity and honour being given to an Indian. Rothenstein himself tells us: 'Fox-Strangways wanted Oxford or Cambridge

* This article was written a few days after the artist's death.

to give Tagore an honorary degree. Lord Curzon, when consulted, said that there were more distinguished men in India than Tagore. I wondered who they were; and I regretted that England had left it to a foreign country to make the first emphatic acknowledgement of his contribution to literature.'

Rothenstein's interest in Indian art dated before he met the Tagores. He had for some time been collecting Indian drawings which he greatly admired. His interest was further stimulated by his contact with Mrs Herringham, Havell, Binyon and Coomaraswamy, who first showed him 'drawings by Abanindranath Tagore and other artists of the Calcutta school'. But hardly any one else in England was interested in the subject. 'I could never understand the lack of interest in Indian art. . . . Later, when Havell returned to England, he, Coomaraswamy and I went to hear a lecture by Sir George Birdwood, who while praising her crafts, denied fine art to India; the noble figure of Buddha he likened to a boiled suet pudding! This so disgusted me that, there and then, I proposed we should found an India Society.'

As Mrs Herringham was leaving for India, Rothenstein also decided to see the land for himself. The India Office was not encouraging. He was warned that his sympathy for India and for things Indian would encourage the Nationalists. He was advised to keep in touch with the officials and to this end was provided with letters to Provincial Governors. But despite the precautions of the India Office, he was able to see something of India. This is what he writes of the Elephanta-Caves in Bombay: 'The rock-cut entrance to the cave-temple was simple and impressive; then deep within the shadow we came upon

the great Trimurthi, a brooding group of three heads of Brahma, carved with a breadth I had never seen surpassed. Then out of the gloom there emerged figures of Siva, of Siva and Parvathi, and of attendant *apsaras*. I knew that Southern India had crystallized, in the Nataraja, in the dance of a single figure, man's profoundest intuition of the universe more simply, more perfectly perhaps, than in any philosophy. This figure, poised between one movement and another, symbolizes the ordered movements of the planets through the contending forces of gravity and attraction; but here in Elephanta the powerful figures, menacing, or lost in meditation, suggest the terror and the peace, the destructive and the creative aspects of nature—the agony of birth, the peace of sleep, and of death. How much sculpture loses when detached from its original setting and placed in a museum, I felt here as never before. We were overwhelmed by the dynamic force of these great carvings, and returned to Bombay with a new conception of plastic art.'

No less interesting and enthusiastic is his description of Benares and the varied procession of humanity he watched day after day at its ghats. He has recorded his impressions not only in moving and lyrical prose but even more effectively in his beautiful drawing: 'Morning at Benares'. In Calcutta he met for the first time the artist brothers—Gaganendranath and Abanindranath. Rabindranath he only saw. 'I was attracted, each time I went to Jorasanko, by their uncle, a strikingly handsome figure, dressed in a white *dhoti* and *chaddar*, who sat silently listening as we talked. I felt an immediate attraction, and asked whether I might draw him, for I discerned an inner charm as well as great physical beauty, which I tried to set down with

my pencil. That this uncle was one of the remarkable men of his time no one gave me a hint.'

In 1912 when Rothenstein was back in England he came across a translation of a story by Rabindranath Tagore in the *Modern Review* (very likely *The Postmaster*). He was impressed and wanted to read more of him. He wrote about it to Jorasanko and received in return 'an exercise book containing translations of poems by Rabindranath, made by Ajit Chakravarty, a schoolmaster on the staff at Bolpur. The poems, of a highly mystical character, struck me as being still more remarkable than the story, though but rough translations.' Soon after the Poet himself visited England. As is well known, he had translated some of his poems into English during his illness prior to departure from India as well as on board the ship. This manuscript he gave to Rothenstein to read. 'That evening,' writes Rothenstein, 'I read the poems. Here was poetry of a new order which seemed to me on a level with that of the great mystics. Andrew Bradley, to whom I showed them, agreed: "It looks as though we have at last a great poet among us again," he wrote. I sent word to Yeats who failed to reply; but when I wrote again he asked me to send him the poems, and when he had read them his enthusiasm equalled mine. . . . The young poets came to sit at Tagore's feet; Ezra Pound the most assiduously. Among others whom Tagore met were Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, Andrew Bradley, Masefield, J. L. Hammond, Ernst Rhys, Fox-Strangways, Sturge Moore, and Robert Bridges. Tagore, for his part, was struck by the breadth of view and the rapidity of thought that he found among his new friends. "Those who know the English only in India, do not know Englishmen," he said.'

The story of the publication of *Gitanjali*, its enthusiastic reception in the English Press, followed by the award of the Nobel Prize, is too well known to need repetition. But Rothenstein's testimony regarding the part played by Yeats in the publication of *Gitanjali* is worth quoting: 'I knew that it was said in India that the success of *Gitanjali* was largely owing to Yeats's rewriting of Tagore's English. That this is false can easily be proved. The original manuscript of *Gitanjali* in English and in Bengali is in my possession. Yeats did here and there suggest slight changes, but the main text was printed as it came from Tagore's hands.'

The friendship thus begun in London lasted all their lives. It is interesting to compare the letters the two wrote to each other when the award of the Nobel Prize was announced in November, 1913. The letters crossed each other on the seas. On November 15, 1913, Rothenstein wrote:

'My very dear friend,

I open the *Times* and a great shout comes from it—Rabindranath has won the Nobel Prize! I cannot tell you of the delight this splendid homage gives me—the crown is now set upon your brow. Surely this, the greatest honour which can come to a man during his lifetime, must make your own heart swell a little, and then happily the prize is materially substantial, and you will, at last, I think, be rid of all anxiety regarding the school. We have made a holiday of this day—all rejoice in the robe of honour in which you have been invested before the eyes of Europe. I took the children for a drive, a long promised one; we had a glorious day, and as it is not often I play

truant, the children were like a peal of bells. My dear friend, from the heart I send you my full congratulations. Never I think did ampler reward fit ampler merit; your pilgrimage is one of the romances of literature. It should awaken the East like a trumpet blast and at last turn the minds of the young men to something more noble and fruitful than political intrigue. For yourself it will be an incentive to a new faith in your own great powers; you are not of those whose heads can be turned by much praise, and in the solitude of Bolpur you will see still deeper into the mysteries of all those common things amongst which men live so unheeding. Poet of the sun, you will sit in the sun, poet of the night, you will go forth into the night, poet of the human heart, you will bring warmth and comfort to a thousand cold and dispirited. Is not this a greater prize than any man can bestow? To be chosen to serve your fellows and your neighbours now reach across the world. We send our love from house to house.

Ever yours—W. R.'

Three days later the Poet was writing:

'The very first moment I received the message of the great honour conferred on me by the award of the Nobel Prize my heart turned towards you with love and gratitude. I felt certain that of all my friends none would be more glad at this news than you. Honour's crown of honour is to know that it will rejoice the hearts of those whom we hold the most dear. But, all the same, it is a very great trial for me. The perfect whirlwind of public excitement it has given rise to is frightful. It is almost as bad as

tying a tin can to a dog's tail making it impossible for him to move without creating noise and collecting crowds all along. I am being smothered with telegrams and letters for the last few days and the people who never had any friendly feelings towards me nor ever read a line of my works are loudest in their protestations of joy. I cannot tell you how tired I am of all this shouting, the stupendous amount of its unreality being something appalling. Really these people honour the honour in me and not myself.'

They did not meet often, for Rothenstein never repeated his visit to India and Tagore's visits to England were few and far between. But across the distance the friendship deepened with the years. Their correspondence, which ended only with the Poet's death, bears ample testimony to it. It is to be hoped that it will be possible one day to publish these letters. It was a healthy friendship, rooted in genuine love and admiration on Rothenstein's part, and free from all trace of insincere flattery or sentimental adulation. Commenting on Tagore's letter to him, quoted above, Rothenstein writes in his Memoirs: 'He was not often to escape the tumult and peace was to be his but at rare moments. Henceforward Tagore was to become a world figure. But great fame is a perilous thing, because it affects not indeed the whole man, but a part of him, and is apt to prove a tyrannous waster of time. Tagore, who had hitherto lived quietly in Bengal, devoting himself to poetry and to his school, would now grow restless. As a man longs for wine or tobacco, so Tagore could not resist the sympathy shown to a great idealist. He wanted to heal the wounds of the world. But a poet, shutting himself away from men to concentrate on his art, most

helps his fellows; to leave his study is to run great risks. No man respected truth, strength of character, single-mindedness and selflessness more than Tagore; of these qualities he had his full share. But he got involved in contradictions. Too much flattery is as bad for a commoner as for a king. Firm and frank advice was taken in good part by Tagore, but he could not always resist the sweet syrup offered him by injudicious worshippers.'

Tagore would not have been the great artist he was if he had 'shut himself away from men to concentrate on his art', as Rothenstein would have wished him to do. Unlike the so-called 'pure' artists, he was an artist with a social conscience, and a moral vision. He took his place in the world of men, had his full share of their abuse and of their praise. Rothenstein perhaps did not know that during his long life the Poet had had as much of the bitter draught of the former as of the sweet syrup of the latter. The one did not embitter his soul, nor the other turn his head. If he enjoyed the sweet syrup he also carried within him its bitter antidote.

Whether Rothenstein's fears were justified or not, however, such honest, well-intentioned criticism is the best tribute a friend and admirer can pay. Some lovers of Tagore will resent such criticism, for love easily turns into idolatry, and admiration into blind worship. Tagore had no patience with idol worshippers, but they clung to him all the same, and will continue to cling to his name. Of such disciples Rothenstein wrote: 'No man's company gives me more pleasure than Tagore's; but among his disciples I am uncomfortable; easy idealism is like Cezannism, or Whistlerism—no, away with the smooth talkers, with those who wear bland spiritual phylacteries upon

their foreheads! These men who specialize, as it were, in idealism give me the sense of discomfort that I feel among other men who do not practise but preach. I marvel always at Tagore's patience with such, who weaken his artistic integrity by flattery, as they weakened Rodin's.'

Such is the fate of great men! Their tolerance and their humanity help them to endure the folly of their followers who everywhere and in all ages have been blind. Where the idol happens to be a Tagore or a Gandhi, the followers are at least harmless. At worst they become bores and make themselves ridiculous. But where the idol is a Churchill, or a Hitler, or a Stalin, or even a Jinnah—God help the world!

X. A POET OF SIND

One of the obvious defects of our English education is that while we are obliged to learn a lot about foreign lands we remain ignorant about our own. I have known several Bengali friends enthusiastically discuss the latest verse written in England or the latest book published by a Russian novelist, who had not even heard the names of the leading poets in Hindi or Gujerati or Marathi, not to speak of any of our South Indian languages. Some have even innocently asked me if Sindhi is a written language or a mere spoken dialect. The same is true of the educated in other provinces. We know much less about one another than an educated Englishman, despite his reputation for insularity, knows about the French or the German. The unity of India, if it is more than a political slogan, has to be made real in our lives by a conscious effort on our part to know more of our own people.

The Sindhi language, like all other North Indian languages, is a near cousin of Bengali. Its basic structure and vocabulary are derived from Prakrit, though in the course of its chequered history, it has been far more influenced by Arabic and Persian than its comparatively sheltered sisters in the east. Today it has lost its original script and is written in a modified form of Arabic script, which more than anything else has alienated it from other members of its stock.

Sind was the first territory in India to bear the brunt of Muslim invasion and was the last Muslim kingdom in India to surrender to the British. The small Hindu minority

which had escaped conversion to Islam was nevertheless compelled to adapt its culture to the culture of its rulers. Persian was the passport to state service as English became later under the British. The study of Persian was therefore cultivated by the educated Hindus, while that of Sanskrit languished for want of patronage. This state of things has continued long after Persian ceased to have any utility. For example, the school in which I studied, though founded by a Hindu and run with Hindu funds, had no provision for the teaching of Sanskrit. We were therefore all of us obliged to learn Persian as our second language. Hence the paradox. The language that the educated Hindus of Sind speak and write is Persianized, while the Sindhi which the simple Muslim poets and villagers of Sind speak is nearer to the original Prakrit. If I were to transliterate in Devnagri or Roman script some of the verses of the poet Shah Abdul Latif, a Bengali or Hindi philologist would be surprised at the number of common words between the Sindhi Muslim's language and his own. But it is not possible to do so in this short article. Instead, I shall give a short account of Shah Latif's life and work so that the reader may know something of this prince of Sindhi poets, whose position in Sindhi letters is comparable to that of Chaucer in English, or Chandidas in Bengali, with this difference that Shah Latif was not only the first great poet of Sind but unfortunately the only one of that stature.

Though born in the last quarter of the seventeenth century (about 1689) not much is known of the life of this great poet. What is known has been handed down by oral tradition, which is prone to invest popular figures with legendary grandeur. He died round about 1752 at

the age of sixty-three. Most of his life he spent in the northern part of what is now Hyderabad District, first in the village of Hala, then Kotri (not to be confused with the present port and railway junction) and finally at a village founded by him and known after him as Bhit Shah. It is interesting to recall that the supposed site of the house of the fifteenth-century Bengali poet Kashiram Das is also known as Keser Bhita.

Shah Latif belonged to a very illustrious Sayid family which originally came to Sind from Herat. The Sayids are hereditary religious teachers and are held in high esteem. The ancestors of Shah Latif had fully earned their title to this esteem. His great-great-grandfather was the famous Shah Karim, a poet of merit and a mystic-saint venerated for his piety and learning. His verses are still read and every year a religious fair is held at his tomb at Bulri where he lived. One of his poems says:

> 'Even if you read all the sacred books, of what avail?
> Can a lame ant in the well measure the skies?
> He who lives in a hut built on the river bank,
> Why need he thirst for water?
> But the fools cry on and understand not.'*

Shah Latif's father was Sayid Habib Shah, who, when the poet was born, was living at Hala Haweli, now in ruins. He was a man of piety and deeply attached to his son. About the boy-poet's education we know very little. The popular tradition is that he had no regular education but taught himself everything. Very likely he was the despair of his teachers like the child Rabindranath. The story goes that when he was a child he was sent to the *muktub* or the village school. 'Say *aliph*,' said the *mullah*

* Quoted in *Sind and its Sufis*, by Jethmal Parsram.

or the Muslim pandit. '*Aliph*,' repeated the child. 'Say *be*,' continued the teacher; but the pupil refused to repeat the second letter of the Arabic alphabet. The *mullah* coaxed, cajoled, threatened and bullied, but the child was obstinate. The *mullah* thereupon complained to the father, who asked the son the reason of his obstinacy. The child replied that *aliph*, being the first letter of the word Allah, was all-sufficing and needed no other letter to supplement it. The story is obviously a later concoction of the poet's admirers who have taken the cue from several of the poet's verses. One of the verses says:

> 'Read the letter *aliph*, and forget all else;
> Keep your heart true, nought else avails.'

There can be no doubt that Shah Latif was an educated man (according to the standards of that age) and knew his Arabic and Persian well. His verses are interspersed with quotations from the Holy Qoran and from the *Masnavi* of the Persian poet and mystic, Jalaluddin Rumi. The aptness with which he has used the verses and the skill with which he has at times rendered them in his own language are testimony to his sound study of both the classical languages, as also of his general familiarity with the lore of Sufi thought. As regards his diatribes against book-learning, they are the commonplaces of almost all Sufi poetry.

Young Latif was an ardent lover of Nature and a keen observer of its varied scenes and moods. It seems he was a regular truant from home and school and used to wander about by himself amidst the sand-hills which surrounded his village. He cultivated the company of wandering saints, both Muslim Sufis and Hindu Yogis, and must have

had an early initiation into spiritual practices from one of them. Some Hindu admirers even believe that the 'sacred word' that he received on initiation was *Om*, for he says in one place: 'If the Guru were to give thee the one curved word, it would be to thee as light in darkness; therefore keep *meem* in thy mind and put *aliph* before it.' The reference to the sacred sound *Om* here is obvious, for this word, when written in Devnagri script has the look of a succession of curves, and when written in the Arabic script would begin with the letter *aliph* and end with *meem*. But such a reference need mean no more than that the Muslim mystic was conversant with some of the spiritual practices of the Hindus; and in fact references to *yogis*, *adesis* and *swamis* are scattered throughout his works.

It is said that once when he did not return home at night, his anxious father went out in search of him and found him seated in meditation near a sand-hill, all covered with sand. When the poor father cried out in dismay fearing that his son had lost consciousness, the boy opened his eyes and responded in verse:

'She is alive and breathing still, yearning for a sight of the Beloved.'

The Sufis, like the Vaishnavas, look upon God as the Beloved. They also for that reason do not despise human love, which they consider as a preliminary training for the cultivation of divine love. *Ishq-i-Majazi* or human love is a door to *Ishq-i-Haqiqi* or divine or absolute love. The Sufi does not believe in image-worship but he believes in the worship of beauty in a human object as a stepping stone to the higher worship of true or absolute Beauty.

Young Latif did not have to wait long for such an experience. Quite early in life he fell in love with the

daughter of the local chieftain, Mirza Moghulbeg. Though the family of Shah Latif was held in high regard, the proud Mirza did not look with favour upon this young vagabond who wandered about the sand-hills and mixed with all sorts of *fakirs* and *yogis*. He refused to give him his daughter in marriage. How the young poet took this refusal, we do not know. Very likely it intensified his love of wandering and of solitude. Whether his travels took place at that period or later, we do not know, but he was a fairly well-travelled man for that age. Among the places he visited was the famous shrine of ascetics at Hinglaj, of which he talks in his poems. This experience of love and separation must also have released the fountain of his inspiration; for the theme of separation is the most recurring one in his verse. Few poets have described the moods of separation in love with such intensity of passion and at the same time with such delicacy of feeling as he has done. In a sense almost all his poetry is one long lament of separation :

The gallows call me. Oh, my friends,
Will any friend now come with me?
They who have found the name of love
Must go of love's necessity.

* * * *

False healers have my feebleness unmanned.
The true physician did not come to me.
But quacks employed their cauterizing brand
And brought more aches and pains than formerly.

* * * *

Ask the moths what know they of burning
That have offered their lives to the blaze.
A thrust from the lance of yearning
Hath pierced their vitals turning
And put an end to their days.

* * * *

O camel, cease to lag behind
And lengthen out thy pace.
This night I have it in my mind
To see my loved one's face.

* * * *

Learn love's test of skill,
O my love, from the kiln.
Though it burneth by night and by day,
From within its hot heart
Not a vapour doth start
The heat that's within to betray.

* * * *

Within the heart red embers glow,
But never outward vapours rise.
Heap up the fire and fan desire
That being burnt may make thee wise.

They surely in the trial have won
Who died by death within the flame.
But they whose hands put out the brands
Have gotten darkness for their name.
Within whose heart love's fires glow,
They've learnt all men can ever know.

* * * *

The seas of separation roll
And drown each single, separate soul.†

No doubt this 'separation' in his poems is more than human and is symbolic of the longing of the soul for union with God; but it is doubtful if he could have invested this mere symbolic and philosophic conception with such flesh and blood, had it not been founded on a solid personal experience of his own.

His own episode of love, however, had a happier ending than the loves of the heroines in his poems. Some years

† H. T. Sorley's translations.

later, after the death of the proud Mirza, he succeeded in marrying the girl he loved.

Gradually his fame as a poet and saint spread and admirers and disciples gathered round him. He left his village and built himself a village of his own amid his favourite sand-hills, which came to be called Bhit and is known today as Bhit Sharif or the Sacred Sand-hill. It is said that he helped to build the village with his own hands. The village was close to Kirar Lake; the nearby trees and patches of green must have relieved the barren desolation of the sand-hills and soothed the eye of the poet. He describes the familiar scene on the lake in his own simple way of the mystic:

> 'The lotus digs its roots in the slime,
> The bee is a denizen of the skies,
> Glory to the love that them unites.'

There the poet spent the last years of his life, surrounded by admirers and disciples. 'Thousands would come to listen to the magic of his poetry and to enjoy the beauty of its message.' It is said that as the poet sang his verses two of his disciples, Tamar and Hashim, took them down. One day the disciples brought the manuscript of the *Risalo* (as his complete works are called) to him. The poet turned over the leaves and was so disappointed at his own work that he threw it into Kirar Lake. The disciples cried over the tragedy and at their pleadings the poet permitted them to write it down again from memory. This is no doubt a mere legend built round some trivial incident and 'intended to build up the tradition of the inspired delivery of the poem'. There are many such legends about the poet, handed down from generation to generation. Here we shall mention two or three to show

how the puranic tradition of myth-making has survived to this day.

One day Shah Latif's wife, who was carrying, longed for a certain kind of fish and sent one of her husband's disciples to procure it. When her husband came to know of it he remarked, 'When the embryo is such a trouble to my *fakirs*, what will the full-blown adult be? May such a blossom be nipped in the bud!' It is said that the child in consequence was still-born, and the Shah left no heir behind him.

Once while he was sitting in meditation, rosary in hand, near the village well, two girls came with pitchers to fetch water. As usual they fell to gossiping. One of them asked the other, 'Have you met your sweetheart?' The other replied, 'A dozen times. And how many times have you met yours?' The first one answered, 'Does one keep count of one's meetings with one's sweetheart?' Shah Latif, who was listening to this conversation, immediately threw away his rosary and exclaimed, 'It is a shame that I should be telling the beads of my rosary, when even this simple village girl knows that in love one keeps no accounts.' And so he sang:

> 'Body their rosary, mind their beads, the heart their harp,
> The strings of longing sing in utter unity.
> The One, the only One, is the song within.
> They whose sleep is prayer wake even in sleep.'

Though Shah Latif belonged to a family of hereditary religious teachers and therefore could not altogether despise religious forms and practices, as some Sufis have done, he was well aware of their spiritual limitations and attached no great importance to them.

'Prayers and the sacred fast—
They too a goodness impart,
But that is another art,
Which brings in Beloved face to face.'

Again he has said:

'Men are angry at vice,
God is angry with me at virtue.'

Or

'They only should bear the sacred mark
Who are faithful to their own heresy.'

Nur Muhammad Kalhoro was the virtual ruler of Sind at that time. The Kalhoros, being the descendants of a *fakir* famed for his piety, had some pretentions to religious supremacy. It is said that Nur Muhammad Kalhoro at first resented the growing reputation of Shah Abdul Latif—which resentment was no doubt fanned by priests and *mullahs* who found their own followers flocking to hear the unorthodox mystic's songs. Nur Muhammad devised a plan to ensnare the poet. He invited him to a dinner, and leaving him alone in a room, sent in a bevy of beautiful dancing girls to tempt him with their charms. The charmers did their best, but it seems the poet-saint was unaffected. When later on the host entered the room, Shah Latif remarked in verse:

'The tangle of illusion ensnares not the Yogis,
No possessions can ever tempt them:
Even if the dancing girls lure,
The Yogis will pass on unscathed.' *

It is said that this incident turned Nur Muhammad's hostility into admiration and he remained till his death

* Quoted in *Sind and its Sufis*, by Jethmal Parsram.

attached to Shah Latif in friendship. Admiring disciples even claim that the birth of Nur Muhammad's great son, Ghulam Shah Kalhoro, was due to the blessing of this poet-saint. It is however a fact that the fine mausoleum which covers the poet's remains at Bhit Sharif was built by Ghulam Shah Kalhoro.

The last years of the poet's life were spent in comparative peace and retirement—but not in obscurity, for his fame had travelled far and wide and admirers flocked from all over the province to listen to his verses and to his wisdom. Though he was born in a distinguished and well-to-do family and though he had won for himself a position of universal admiration and veneration, he never gave up the simple and austere ways of a man of God and was the very picture of humility. On this point the testimony of his contemporaries is unanimous. To quote the words of his English biographer, H. T. Sorley: 'His whole life was one of continence and abstemiousness then sufficiently rare amongst the race from which he sprang. He was characterized by a gentleness of manner and speech, an innate gentlemanliness, a bent of kindness, compassion and generosity which make him, as a man, a person worthy of the utmost respect. He is said to have hated cruelty and to have been unable to bear to beat an animal or cause physical pain to man or beast. In an age and amongst a population that set little store by chastity, he exhibited towards women a self-control that was remarkable.'

He was a Shia by caste and though the majority of Sind Muslims are Sunnis, this difference did not stand in the way of his being accepted as a spiritual teacher by Muslims of both sects, as his being a Muslim has not stood

in the way of the universal regard in which he is today held by the Hindus of Sind. That he was a Shia not only by birth but by voluntary faith as well is evidenced by the fact that in the last years of his life he expressed a desire to make the pilgrimage to Kerbela rather than to Mecca. He was, however, persuaded by his disciples not to undertake the arduous journey at his age. He therefore satisfied himself by composing the *Sur Kedaro*, which deals with the story of Hassan and Hussain.

About the circumstances of his death not much is known. Tradition has it that 'shortly before his death he retired into solitude. Coming out again he performed his ablutions, put on a white sheet and ordered the singing of songs. When the music stopped, he fell into a reverie of divine contemplation.'

The mausoleum built by Ghulam Shah Kalhoro exists to this day and attracts crowds of devout pilgrims, Hindu and Muslim, from all over Sind. Since the poet's death (*circa* 1752) every Friday his verses are recited and sung there. Here is a description of one such weekly 'vigil' by a renowned Hindu scholar, Dayaram Gidumal, who had visited the shrine in 1882. 'The deepest silence occasionally broken by a hearty *Allahu* prevailed in the wide courtyard where I kept my memorable vigil with more than a hundred men, women and children. The subdued and tranquil look of these people—their simple habits—their gentle demeanour—their strong faith and their erect but humble attitude of mind made a very great impression upon me and inspired me with a most profound veneration and admiration for the poet-saint who was their recognized spiritual teacher and whose burning words and breathing thoughts moved them to tears.'

Of these 'burning words and breathing thoughts' we have said but little in this short essay, in which a sketch of the poet's life has taken up most of the space. The poems of Shah Abdul Latif are a vast treasure-house in which the passionate yearnings of a soul in quest of the Supreme Beloved, profound truths and homely commonplaces of Sufistic lore, the folk-tales of Sind and descriptions of Sind's landscape in different seasons, are woven together in a pattern whose motifs are culled from various sources, whose colours are mixed with the soil and sand and rocks of Sind, whose threads are spun out of that heightened consciousness which we associate with all great poetry, and whose texture is the texture of the purest lyricism.

XI. THE RASHTRAPATI

Fortune is fickle, and nowhere more so than in politics. In July 1946 friends came to sympathize with Acharya Kripalani for what seemed then a public discomfiture. He had ceased to be the General Secretary of the Congress, which post he had held for twelve consecutive years, and he had not been considered useful or important enough to be retained as a member of the Working Committee. His political career seemed suddenly to have come to an end. Those who feared his aggressive advocacy of Gandhian ideology thought his exit a good riddance. The Socialist weekly, *Janata*, chuckled over the fact in its usual, cheeky, adolescent manner. But Fortune, the great master of irony, turned the wheel and within four months the Congress electorate conferred on the erstwhile outcast the highest honour the nation could give. Acharya Kripalani was elected President of the 54th session of the Indian National Congress—without a contest. The election was all the more noteworthy inasmuch as Gandhiji and the Working Committee, contrary to practice, refrained from guiding the nation in the choice of the President and allowed the electorate full freedom to exercise its vote.

It was appropriate that the new Rashtrapati was called upon to preside over the Meerut session of the Congress, for it was in Meerut that he had founded the Gandhi Ashram which is a living monument of his service of the masses. Many people who have heard him speak or read his writings look upon him as only a theoretical exponent

of the Gandhian Way. They do not know that he was in the field long before he came on the platform and that for years he was content to work in obscurity carrying out Gandhiji's Constructive Programme in the villages. He served a long and arduous apprenticeship before he came into the limelight. And today if he is proud of anything it is of that. The organization that he has built up is one of the foremost of its kind in India and has a network of centres and branches all over the United Provinces and Delhi. It provides employment to thousands of villagers and maintains hundreds of whole-time workers. If it does not make enough noise in the political world, it is because Acharya Kripalani, true to his master's teaching, has sedulously avoided exploiting his organization's service in the villages for political and private ends. Not many politicians would have resisted such a temptation.

In fact, he lacks the temperament of a successful politician. He is devoid of ambition and is ill-versed in the art of using his fellow-men as pawns in a game. Though he has a shrewd judgement and easily sees through cant and humbug in others, he does not know how to use the power which this knowledge gives him. Rather he turns it into a weakness by freely expressing his estimate of men and affairs in witty and pungent phrases, which, though they sound amusing and clever, are not likely to make him popular in a world where heroes like to hide their feet of clay. A successful politician must cultivate the virtues of both a general in the field and of a popular star on the stage. Like the one he must know how to take advantage of the weakness in the enemy's defences and like the other he must know how to strike effective poses and hold the eye. He must have something of a Shivaji

and something of a Kananbala. Kripalani has neither the one nor the other. He lacks the will to power and the necessary combination of ruthlessness and cunning. These are serious defects in a political leader. No wonder he does not command the popularity or power which his long record of selfless service, his unblemished character and his brilliant intellectual gifts might otherwise have earned him.

Though he is today the titular head of the Congress he is by no means the power behind it. His election to the present high office is not a measure of the power he wields in the Congress organization. He is neither a popular idol nor a party boss. He wields neither glamour nor power. He has risen from the ranks by sheer merit of service and ability, unaided by such extraneous influences as family, wealth or the patronage of the powerful, which have helped build the career of many an eminent politician. He has not even had the backing of his province which, in a democratic organization like the Congress, is so potent a factor. His passport to eminence is the recognition by Congressmen of his long and selfless service of the nation and his devotion to the Gandhian ideology.

Jiwatram Bhagwandas Kripalani was born in 1888 in Hyderabad (Sind) in a middle-class family of what are known as Amils. This small community of Hindu Kshatryas scattered in the different towns of Sind have come to be known as Amils or Dewans because at one time they seem to have been the only educated community in Sind and therefore enjoyed a virtual monopoly of administrative employment both under the Muslim rulers and till recently under the British. Of them the Amils of Hyderabad formed the most exclusive and snobbish class. They

are essentially and absolutely bourgeois, with all the virtues and vices of this class addicted to a petty bureaucratic tradition. They are a self-assertive and self-complacent community of intelligent men who dread originality, of educated men who hold learning in little esteem, of respectable men who do not waste time in mere cultural pursuits. They are smart and sensible but neither subtle nor sensitive, bold but not brave, active but not adventurous. In such a community a person like Acharya Kripalani would naturally seem a freak. And so he is. It is not surprising that he is least appreciated by the people of his own community and province. It was a sound instinct which made him a voluntary exile at the very outset of his career, and found him both honour and happiness outside his province.

And yet he was not such a freak in his own family. One of his brothers had early renounced the world and turned a Sanyasi. Two other brothers denounced their religion and embraced Islam. Their children are devout Muslims and staunch Leaguers. Nevertheless they are fond of their uncle, who is even more fond of them. In 1945 when he was released from Karachi Prison, his Muslim niece came to see him. As he embraced her, he laughed and said, 'Here we are, two nations in one family.' His father was a man of stern disposition whose irascible temper was dreaded by not only his own children but all children in the neighbourhood. This violence of temper seems to have been a common family trait, for according to Acharya Kripalani he was the gentlest-tempered in the whole family.

In a household where every member was an uncompromising individualist, young Jiwat was thrown on his

own resources. He was wild and wayward and had a healthy contempt for book-learning. Agile and adventurous, he was always up to some mischief or the other. Even now he can climb a palmyra tree with the agility of a squirrel. His one passion was gambling which, as he is fond of saying, he never outgrew, though as he grew older he discarded the dice and learnt to gamble with his life. He experienced as much as he could and read as little as he could so that he was a constant headache to his teachers. Twice he was expelled from the college for his radical political views, first from the Wilson College, Bombay, and later from the D. J. Sind College, Karachi. After graduating and before taking his M.A. degree he worked for some time as a school-teacher but was soon obliged to leave the school, for he had a way of infecting the young with his political idealism which the Headmaster considered dangerous and undesirable.

Later he became Professor of History at the Muzaffarpur College in Bihar. It was during his career at Muzaffarpur that he came in contact with Gandhiji. He first met him at Santiniketan in 1914, where Gandhiji and his boys of the Phoenix School had found their home after their return from South Africa. Gandhiji still addresses him as Professor. The Professor was at that time a believer in the political ideology of Tilak and Aurobindo which his knowledge of history seemed to confirm. One can imagine his sarcastic smile as he listened to the apostle of non-violence expounding his creed. 'A first-class crank', he must have thought. 'But what a superb crank! Here is a man who is capable of practising what he preaches.' It was in 1917 during the Champaran Satyagraha that the Professor's conversion began. As Gandhiji

knew no one else in Muzaffarpur, he came and stayed with him before moving into the interior of the district to lead the peasants of Champaran in their resistance against the oppression of the British indigo planters. For daring to harbour so dangerous a guest, the Professor lost his job in the College. But it was a welcome deliverance, for it gave him a chance to participate actively in the battle, and earn the distinction of being the first Satyagrahi to be arrested in Champaran.

What converted him was not the theory of non-violence but its practice under Gandhiji's leadership. He saw with his own eyes the miracle of the timid, terror-stricken peasants, to whom craven submission to oppression had become a second nature, stand up with their heads erect and defy the armed might of British imperialism. Here was the magician who alone could repeat the miracle all over India and raise its dumb millions to the full stature of manhood without which independence was not only not possible but meaningless. The conversion though slow was complete. The decision made, the Professor cast in his lot with Gandhiji. Since then his faith in him has never wavered. Each fresh experience has only reinforced it, till today his understanding of Gandhiji and his technique of resistance is so deep that it is almost intuitive. He can almost predict Gandhiji's reactions to any particular issue insofar as the inscrutable Mahatma's reactions can be predicted. He hardly ever reads what Gandhiji writes and can never quote him correctly, and yet his exposition of the Gandhian Way makes explicit what is implicit in Gandhiji's writings and gives coherence to what often seems contradictory.

After Champaran he acted for some time as Professor in the Benares Hindu University till the first Non-co-operation Movement when he, with a batch of students whom he had inspired, left the University and founded the Gandhi Ashram at Benares which he later shifted to Meerut. He was one of the first to carry out in a concrete and organized manner Gandhiji's Constructive Programme in the villages having early realized that this was the basic preparation for a non-violent struggle for freedom, freedom not only from political but from economic exploitation as well.

In 1923 Gandhiji called him to take charge as Principal or Acharya of the Gujerat Vidyapith, the national college he had founded at Ahmedabad. Since then the Professor has come to be known as Acharya, though Gandhiji himself continues to call him by his former title. He served the Vidyapith for five years in an honorary capacity and then returned to the obscurity of constructive work in the villages. In 1934 he was called by Dr Rajendra Prasad to assist him in the relief work after the great earthquake of Bihar. In the same year he was appointed General Secretary of the Congress.

Such in brief is the political record of a man who, without being a popular hero or a party boss, has been accorded the highest honour that a Congressman can aspire to. What sort of a man is he? Different people give different answers. Ask his numerous colleagues who have worked with him in the constructive field for years and known him intimately, and you will find that they almost worship him, though an element of fear is not unmixed with the worship. It is obvious that he must have been a hard taskmaster who did not spare himself.

It is equally obvious that he must have been a very affectionate and fascinating teacher, for his old students of Bihar and Gujerat days continue to love and admire him, as few Professors are loved and admired. Those who have worked with him or been his students or otherwise known him intimately do not seem to mind either the violence of his temper or the biting pungency of his tongue. They enjoy his humour even when they occasionally wince under its sarcasm. They know that behind the seeming snobbery of his aloofness, his cynicism and his bantering humour lies a very warm heart rich in human sympathy and affection.

But those who know him only in the political field value him differently. Though he is one of the oldest and most faithful followers of Gandhiji, many Gandhi-ites dislike him intensely. He is an anti-humbug, an enemy of pomposity, and loves to make fun of those who, in their attempt to model themselves on Gandhiji, succeed only in turning themselves into his caricatures. He loves to be frivolous in the presence of the solemn and parades his cynicism before those who take their pretensions too seriously. Once he shocked his audience at a meeting in Ahmedabad, where glowing tributes were being paid to the influence of Gandhiji on Indian life and character, by remarking that the only influence he could discern of Gandhiji on himself was in his dress.

The Socialists dislike him no less heartily, except such of them as have known him intimately. It is surprising that the Socialists should dislike him, for between his interpretation of Gandhism and their reconsideration of Socialism there is hardly any difference. In 1934 when the Socialist Party was first founded, he was even invited

to join it and lead it. He refused on the ground that he did not regard himself an alternative to Gandhiji and that in his opinion such a party within the Congress was not only unnecessary but was likely to do more harm than good. He has never deviated from that view and has made no secret of it. No wonder the Socialists resent his attack on the very *raison d'etre* of their party. And yet this antipathy need not be there if he were more discreet in the expression of his random judgements, and did not make so great a virtue of calling a spade a spade, and if the Socialists, in their turn, were not so much in love with their day-dreams of adolescence.

Politicians are generally adepts in the art of seeming better than they are. Kripalani is, in that respect, the reverse of a politician. He delights in seeming worse than he is, though he resents it if he is judged by what he appears to be. To that extent his logic is a woman's logic. He thinks that he has a right to misrepresent himself but that others have no right to misunderstand him. He can be cynical about others, often out of sheer impishness, but if others are cynical about his motives he thinks they are being perverse. He is at heart generous, sometimes recklessly so, and yet he loves to pick a quarrel with a station coolie or tongawalla over a two-anna bit. He is completely unattached to material possessions of which he has very little and yet on occasions gives the impression of being a miser. He loves deeply and talks callously, feels intensely and smiles cynically, thinks logically and argues intemperately, follows faithfully and sneers irreverently, has the vision of a revolutionary and blinks like a reactionary. He loves the Socialists and quarrels with them and despises the die-hards and works

with them. He is a rebel who conforms to authority, an iconoclast who worships an idol, an idealist who boasts of realism, an ascetic who revels in frivolity. He has no ambition and enters the lists, no axe to grind and takes sides, is a profound believer in non-violence, always itching for a fight.

He is proud of his intellect and flatters himself that he is always logical. But though he has a fine and sensitive intellect, he is more emotional than intellectual, more devotional than rational. He has the brains of a man and the heart of a woman, a combination excellent otherwise but fatal in a politician. He reacts emotionally and then rationalizes his reactions and because he has a sharp intellect, he can, with its rapier-like thrusts, expose the illogicalness of his opponent's position, without however proving the logic of his own. His intellect is at its best in a forensic duel. He wields it as a fencer wields his sword. His weakness as a fencer is that the blood mounts to his brain too easily. He loses his temper and makes himself vulnerable. For all his skill he is no match against a cool, crafty and cunning opponent. That is why he has won more honour than power in the Congress and though vested with the highest authority feels continually frustrated. He would gladly withdraw from politics and retire to his ashram if he did not feel that withdrawal at this time would be a desertion of the organization he has served so long. He is like a bull yoked to the plough waiting for the end of the furrow.

He grew up in the Gandhian tradition of austere living and active service of the poor, when the reward of patriotism was poverty and prison. He found happiness in that atmosphere of moral idealism. Today he finds the patriot

hunting for reward in position and power. He is not cynical enough to reconcile himself to the change, nor strong enough to stem the tide, nor discreet enough to hold his peace. He finds Gandhiji's influence waning and the moral idealism he had inspired and sustained replaced by political realism. For a passionate believer in the Gandhian Way it is not easy to toe the line with those who think that Gandhi has outlived his use. He frets and fumes but is kept in leash by his loyalty to the very values which he defends.

Political virtues are not identical with moral virtues, though the two are not unrelated. While the moral man must carry his conscience with him, the politician must carry the multitude. He must know how to make his will felt, how and when to court the crowd, how and when to coerce it. Not every one is a Gandhi, who is as supreme a politician as he is superb a man. The Acharya lacks the strength to carry both his conscience and the crowd with him and prefers to keep his conscience, which makes him more admirable as a man than effective as a politician. As a man he has a very striking individuality, which not only attracts attention in a crowd but creates a definite impression. You either like him or dislike him. It is difficult to feel indifferent about him. But in politics he has not been able to make his individuality felt to the same extent, except as an intellectual exponent of the Gandhian Way. In politics he is not reckoned a force in himself, not because he lacks insight or ability but because he lacks that elusive something which makes a man seem a hero to his fellow-men, or that more substantial virtue, the iron will to power, which ruthlessly pursues its goal and which the multitude at once fear and worship. Some-

times his very virtue acts like a drawback as, for example, his loyalty to the Gandhian ideology and to the Congress organization which is interpreted as a proof of his fanaticism or of his lack of original thinking. In democratic politics it is more profitable to be critical than to be loyal, more heroic to be adolescent than to be mature.

He is one of those cases where small vices neutralize big virtues. His biggest vices are his sudden explosions of temper and his irrepressible delight in pricking others' bubbles. He is by nature loving and tolerant and yet he would sometimes fly into such a fit of temper or of sarcasm as to make the person he loves cry or gnash his teeth in rage. What he calls his innocent jokes are more often impish than innocent and hurt more than open criticism. Nobody likes his bubble to be pricked, especially politicians whose greatness depends so largely on seeming bigger than they are. They forgive opposition more easily than ridicule. They prefer an enemy who challenges them to a friend who deflates them, specially when the friend has the gift of wit which makes his remarks too amusing not to be relished by a third party. He has strong likes and dislikes which he takes no pains to hide. He expresses his reactions with a vehemence which make them seem stronger than they are, and which mislead strangers into thinking that he is intolerant and fanatical. This impression is reinforced by the ascetic cut of his face and the sharp scimitar-shape of his nose. The tenderness in his eyes is not obvious to the superficial eye. These little vices of his have cost him dear politically.

But he does not care. He is cynical of the admiration or censure of those who cannot see beneath the rough coat of arms he wears. 'They say. What do they say?

Let them say,' is his attitude. He is sensitive only to Gandhiji's reactions, to whom his devotion is that of a Hindu wife to her husband, except that this devotion is exclusively to Gandhiji's moral and political personality. He cares little for Gandhiji's fads and though he lives for Gandhiji he would find it hard to live with him. This devotion is absolute. It is free from any motive or reservation. It has given him an insight into Gandhiji's mind and personality which no other follower can claim. It is at once the source of his strength and his weakness, his glory and his bondage. Though formally he is the Rashtrapathi, his role in the Indian political world is that of the Rashtrapatni, if the real Rashtrapati is Gandhi.

XII. WHO IS A GANDHI-ITE?

Who is a Gandhi-ite? Such a variety of specimens claim this honour that to attempt to classify them lands one in a maze. Often the differences among them are greater than the differences betweenGandhi-ites and others. Often their dislike of each other is heartier than their dislike of non-Gandhi-ites. Among them will be found saints and crooks, heroes and cowards, patriots and parasites, intellectuals and imbeciles, idealists and opportunists, men of steel and men with no guts. These are extremes, but in between are many shades fading into one another. The types cut across each other and defy classification. Nevertheless three broad categories may be distinguished—patriots, politicians, and the pious. The types are pure only at extreme ends. In between they freely intermingle.

To take the last type first. The pious are mainly those who look upon Gandhi as a religious man in the garb of a politician and hang on every word of his as on a gospel. They are more than mere political followers. They are disciples for whom everything the master did is sacred; his every fad is for them a ritual. Their devotion is absolute. 'Where the heart lies, let the head lie too.' Their sincerity is touching. They believe they are following Gandhi even when they merely imitate his gestures. This type has saints at one end and cranks at the other. Their common characteristic is that they spin religiously and rarely smile. Every spinner is not necessarily a Gandhi-ite, just as all who take bread and wine are not

Christians. This is a special prerogative of those who look upon the act as a sacrament, who feel virtuous because they spin. There are many amongst them who consider ritualistic spinning not enough. They would add to it a shaven head and a half-dhoti worn above the knee. Others again wear a perpetual frown. Gandhi smiled in suffering, but these do not even suffer a smile. Or if they do, it must be a smile, charitable and joyless. To see Gandhi face to face was to feel the breath of heaven. His presence acted like a spiritual tonic. To live with some Gandhi-ites is like being shut up in a room without ventilation. Their pious presence acts like a sponge, sucking up all joy from one's heart. I heard a friend once remark: 'God bless Gandhi, but God help Gandhi-ites!' Many a victim would echo this cry. These Gandhi-ites are, however, generally harmless and sometimes even amusing, so long as one is not obliged to live long in their midst. Needless to say, there are some among them whose qualities of head and heart one cannot but admire. A rare one among them can laugh heartily too.

The patriots followed Gandhi less as a Mahatma than as a political leader. They were not blind to his great ethical personality. In fact, they made use of it when it suited them. But their allegiance was inspired by his political genius rather than by his moral or religious experiments. The patriots, like the pious, cover a wide range. Some accepted Gandhi because his political leadership under the circumstances was inevitable. They would not have minded changing their allegiance if another leader could have delivered the goods better. Others, however, were convinced of the absolute political wisdom of Gandhi and would rather have followed him

into the wilderness than followed any other leader. Some of them are also whole-hearted believers in his economic ideas and try bravely to carry out his constructive programme. A good many patriots also spin, but they generally prefer to keep no record of their spinning. They spin when they can, and when they can't, they do not suffer from insomnia on that account. They genuinely respected Gandhi the man, but thought that his goodness, like pure gold, needed a little of baser metal to make it a proper alloy, hard and serviceable. This baseness they supplied from their own stocks. They have renounced much, almost everything, except their love of power which they cannot distinguish from their patriotism. They carry out Gandhi's instructions to the letter, but the spirit is their own. They are brave, loyal and persevering. Their patriotism, sacrifice and personal integrity are beyond reproach. Nevertheless, Gandhism changes colour in their hands as Ganges water in the dyer's vat.

Then there are the politicians pure. They wear their Gandhism as a livery of power. They love themselves more than they love their country and worship whatever god is installed in the shrine. They are the priests who swallow offerings meant for the deity. What Gandhi renounced, they acquire, what he denounced they practise. They secretly laughed at Gandhi, but thought it desirable to humour him and to march under his banner, for the 'crank' happened to be a shrewd politician and wielded magic power with the people. If Gandhism pays good dividends, why not invest in Gandhism? They look upon sacrifice as a necessary evil, which they avoid as far as possible. When it was dangerous to follow Gandhi, they lay low, or fell ill or managed to differ from Gandhi. As

soon as it paid to follow him they turned devout disciples. They have a sweet tongue and pleasant manners and are liked even by those whom they betray. They neither toiled nor spun, they neither did nor died. They reaped what others sowed.

Between these three types are a hundred others which cannot be classified. They have something of each in varying proportions. Then there are others who are types in themselves, who are *sui generis*. Some of them are worthy of the highest respect. They would be eminent in any country and in any age. They are leaders in their own right. Yet so overpowering was the personality of Gandhi, so irresistible his magnetism, that they were drawn under his influence. In short, all sorts of people make up the Gandhi-ites. Angels and impostors, those who faced bullets and those who slunk away from the battle-field, those who renounced wealth and those who amassed it, those who love to bask in the limelight and those who are content to serve the people in obscurity, they all swear by Gandhi.

The intrepid Augusters did whatever they did during the August upheaval in the name of Gandhi. The Joshi-ites too waged the 'people's war' against their own people in the name of Gandhi. Who is not a Gandhi-ite today? The Socialists have sweetened the wine of Marxism with the syrup of Gandhism. The Indian Communists have flavoured their vodka with it. Who knows even Jinnah may turn a Gandhi-ite one day and preach the virtues of non-violence and tolerance, if the Indian Union threatens an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. May be one day Stalin himself will turn a Gandhi-ite, if the Russian scientists fail to make the atom bomb in time.

But while every one is some sort of a Gandhi-ite, how many are Gandhi-like? The different facets of Gandhi's personality are reflected in different followers, but hardly any one carries in him that unique combination of seemingly contrary qualities that made Gandhi what he was. Those who emulate his saintliness tend to be flabby, colourless and insipid. Those who adopt his fads become little better than his caricatures. Those who cultivate his inflexibility of will become intolerant, and those who practise his tolerance become ineffective. Those who flaunt his revolutionary zeal turn themselves into fanatics, and those who borrow his political wisdom tend to become Chanakyas or Machiavellis. Gandhi's influence has all the virtues of a rainfall, beneficent or harmful, according to the nature of the soil on which it falls, the manner of its irrigation and the quality of the seed planted. It makes a garden here, a ripe field there, a jungle here and a malarial swamp there. To follow Gandhi is not enough. To be swamped with Gandhism may even be harmful. Only he who is true to himself can in the long run be true to Gandhi. Only he who loves truth more than he loves Gandhi can ever hope to become like Gandhi.

XIII. YESTERDAY AND TODAY

(15th August, 1947)

Five years ago on this very day India was seething with rebellion. From the depths of her anguished heart had risen the cry 'Quit India'. Men, women and children were mercilessly beaten for echoing it. Young men were shot dead for daring to hoist the Tri-colour flag. Congress-men were either shut up in jails or were being hunted down like criminals. Patriotism was treason. The British Viceroy ruled as the sole arbiter of India's destiny and was the most hated man in the country.

Today, five years later, the Viceroy divests himself of his viceroyalty and invests the rebel people with sovereign rights. The rebels in turn invite him to continue as the formal head of their new free State. He hoists the Tri-colour where flew the Union Jack and salutes it. The change of scene is so dramatic as to seem almost unreal.

Till yesterday the sovereignty resided in the British Parliament and the Viceroy represented the King-Emperor. Till yesterday the Viceroy with the authority of the Parliament could have dissolved the Constituent Assembly and put both Nehru and Jinnah under arrest, and no court in India would have challenged his action. Today the Emperor has ceased to be, the Parliament has ceased to legislate for India and the Governor-General becomes the first servant of the Indian people.

That technically India is a Dominion in the British Commonwealth does not in the least take away from her

sovereignty as a free State. She is free to will herself out of the Commonwealth, if she so chooses, and that is the real test of freedom. Till yesterday India was a subject country; the key of her destiny was in England's hand. Today she is a sovereign State, equal in status with Britain. August fifteenth thus marks a great event, one of the greatest in the history of the world. Four hundred million people have today shaken off the foreign yoke. More than that. For the end of British rule in India must inevitably lead to its end in Burma and Ceylon as well. In fact it means the end of imperialism in Asia.

So colossal a revolution has taken place without violence such as has disfigured the Jewish independence movement in Palestine. It is a unique revolution, not only because it has freed more people from the foreign yoke than any other single event in history but because it has proved that it is possible to do so without a bloody war. It has shown the alternative to terrorism and war, which threaten to destroy the whole fabric of civilized existence. It has not led to a military dictatorship as revolutions generally do. It has been achieved by a process which has educated and strengthened the masses and wherein the masses have directly participated. It has forged a weapon for the masses which they can wield as effectively against their own Government, if it neglected their interest, as they did against the foreigner. It has not only secured independence but safeguarded democracy.

The chief architect of this revolution is Mahatma Gandhi. He it was who infused courage in the inert masses of India and roused their dormant will to freedom. He forged the weapon of non-violent resistance for the unarmed. But to the success of his experiment other factors

have also contributed. The last war upset the balance of international forces and so weakened Britain, despite her success in the war, that she was not in a position to retain her empire in India by mere force of arms. The experience of the war also chastened the mood of the British people and helped the more intelligent among them to realize that it was wiser and better in England's larger interests to part gracefully with power, which in any case they could not retain for long, and win India's friendly co-operation than to risk losing her goodwill for ever. That they had the wisdom to realize this and the courage to give effect to it is a tribute to British statesmanship. By renouncing what sooner or later they would have had to give up in any case, they have not only rid themselves of their biggest headache but have gained a great moral prestige in the eyes of the world. Thus India's gain is not Britain's loss, nor India's victory Britain's defeat. In fact Britain has cast off a crown of thorns and put on a crown of glory.

The glory would have been more real if Britain before withdrawal had not broken up the political unity of India, which was the only good result of her rule and which, if it had remained, would have offset in our mind the bitter memory of her long misrule. But unfortunately she either did not wish to leave a strong and united India or was powerless to control the Frankenstein which her policy of divide-and-rule had raised. As it is, she leaves behind an India, free no doubt, but divided and distracted, an India whose joy of freedom is not unmixed with pain and bitterness.

Nevertheless we are thankful for the dawn of this day which marks the end of foreign rule in India. Though

wounded and bleeding, India is at last free to shape the course of her destiny. This is the great significance of this day and its great blessing. No other consideration must blind us to this great significance. Whatever the wound caused by the partition of India and whatever the dangers that lurk ahead, it is unmanly of us not to rejoice that we are at last masters of our destiny and that it is our privilege as a free people to face all perils with calmness and courage. Though our territory has shrunk, our stature as citizens of a free state has grown. We can make of India what we like, which is what matters most. If we have the vision, the will and the courage, we can one day recover the full glory of a united India.

But though it is proper to rejoice on this day, it would be fatal to hug the illusion that with the withdrawal of British rule from India, all the ills we had suffered from would automatically disappear. The freedom we have achieved today is a negative freedom, freedom from the foreign yoke, which had suppressed our personality and stultified our growth. This freedom needs to be filled with positive content, if the masses are to feel its glow in their daily lives. The thrill of seeing the national flag fly over the government secretariat would not sustain the common man in his struggle for existence if the flag did not convey to him the assurance that those who sit and work in those massive buildings are inspired by a passion for his welfare. Freedom, like God in the Hindu Pantheon, has many forms.

The forms in which the common man worships it is freedom from want and freedom from fear. It is these freedoms which the new flag symbolizes for him.

And yet the full significance of this day would be lost if the people looked only to the Government for the cure of their ills. What is inaugurated today is not merely a free national state but a democratic state, i.e. a state where every citizen shares directly or indirectly the responsibility of government. If this responsibility is not exercised, if the people do not actively co-operate with the government, the government, with the best will in the world, will be unable to cope with the pressing problems that confront the nation.

Freedom is a great privilege and a great responsibility. If the privilege is to be shared by all alike, the responsibility too must be so shared. Till yesterday we could with impunity blame the British for every ill and every misfortune. From today we can no longer do so. From now on we have no excuse for disorder save our disorderliness, no excuse for poverty save our incompetence, no excuse for disease save our ignorance. This is the meaning of freedom.